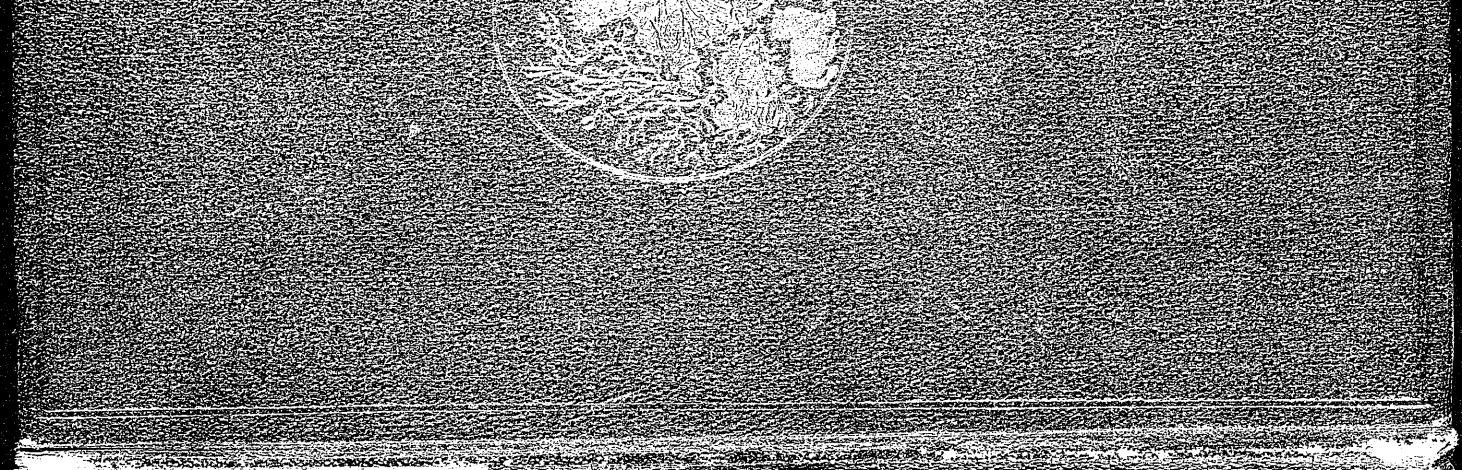

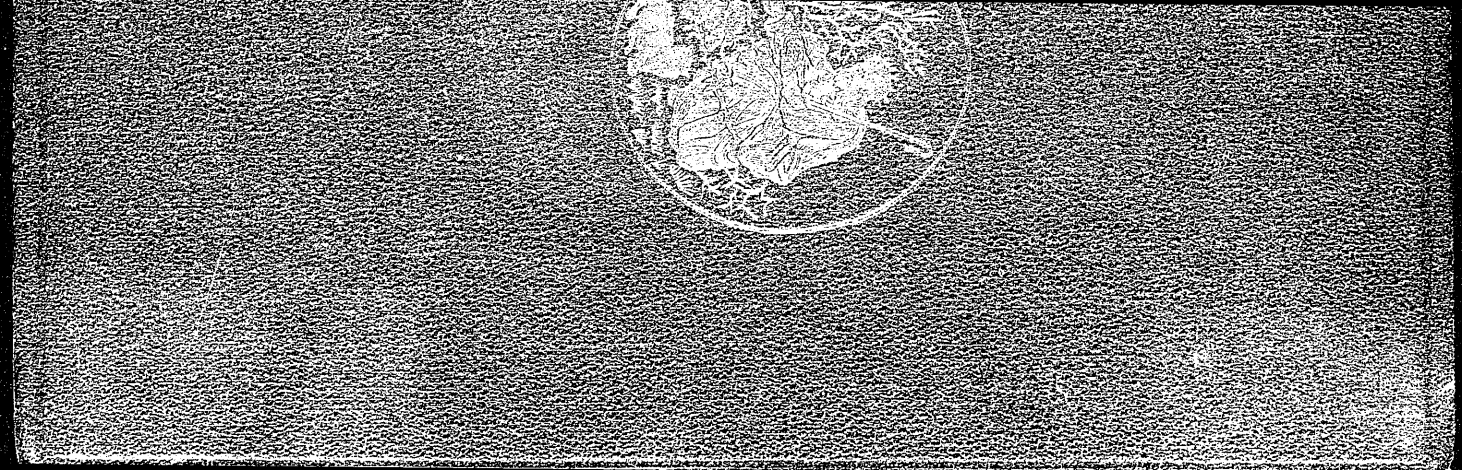

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THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST

By the Rev. ANTHONY W. Thorold, M.A.
PREBENDARY OF YORK
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TO

THE FLOCK OF CHRIST

IN ST GILES IN THE FIELDS

GIVEN ME TO FEED FOR TEN HAPPY YEARS

I OFFER THIS BOOK

IN UNDYING AFFECTION.

PREFACE.

THIS volume is the substance of some lectures on the twenty-third psalm preached in the Parish Church of St Giles in the Fields during the Lent of 1865, and here recast, with a good deal of expansion and some almost unavoidable repetition, into a permanent form.

To the position assumed all through it, that "The Lord—my shepherd" is the "Good Shepherd" of Christ's own parable, no sound critical objection can, I think, be made.

It is, however, quite possible, that some may demur, either to occasional doctrinal applications of the psalm as plainly remote from the inspired author's purpose, or to certain of the practical lessons drawn from it as overstrained and irrelevant.

To any such criticisms my answer is to be found in the deep conviction, that Holy Scripture cannot easily be too much trusted and used, not indeed for rules, but for what is far better, Eternal principles for human thought and conduct; also in the firm belief that the Divine promises, when carefully studied in the history of Him who is the life and light of men, are "exceeding broad," just because they cover ground as wide as life itself.

In sending it out to the world, the

writer feels to be parting from a dear and pleasant friend, who has solaced tedious months of sickness and inactivity now in God's great goodness over. Those months will hardly have been endured for nothing, if some of the lessons learned in them, and written here, shall be of some avail in comforting and instructing others; and if the study of this blessed psalm shall ever so little help any, who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, to abide in Him as their Saviour, to walk with Him as their friend, and to look for Him as their King.

12 CHESTERFIELD STREET, MAYFAIR, W.
January 24, 1869.

CONTENTS.

		PAGE
I.	CHRISTIAN ASSURANCE,	1
II.	DIVINE PROVIDENCE,	37
III.	CHASTISEMENT,	81
IV.	THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH,	127
V.	THE TABLE OF GOD,	165
VI.	ETERNAL LIFE,	215
	INDEX,	261

To facilitate the reading of this book in small portions, the subjects, as they occur, are noted in the margin, and the first word of the different sections is marked by an initial letter.

"My presence shall go with thee; and I will give thee rest."

I.

CHRISTIAN ASSURANCE.

I.

CHRISTIAN ASSURANCE.

"THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD: I SHALL NOT WANT."

> "*Que de perfectionnements avant que l'homme daigne songer à celui de son âme! N'est-il pas étrange de le voir penser à s'assurer toutes choses excepté son salut? restaurer toutes choses, excepté sa conscience? speculer sur toutes choses, excepté sur l'éternité?*"
>
> —VINET.

Introduction.

GOD for us, God with us, God in us — these are the ideas which describe our religion. For they explain its motive, they declare its meaning, they define its doctrine. The motive is, that God being for us, all things shall work together for our good, if we are for Him. The meaning is, that God being with us, His Providence is ever ready to lead us

Psalm cvii. 7. on *by the right way.* The doctrine is, that an indwelling God is our salvation.

Adolphe Monod, detecting a historical relation between these ideas of God's favour, God's presence, and God's indwelling, finds the first in the Old Testament, the second in the Gospels, the third in the Epistles. In the Old Testament we see God both on our side, and also with us, yet with us only occasionally, and by means of angels. In the Gospels, God speaks to us by His Son. Since Christ went away, we have had the

John xiv. 17. promise of the Comforter. *He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.*

Like blazing torches gleaming at long intervals over a wide and dark plain, the various manifestations of Jehovah in the interval from the fall to the Incarnation kept fresh in men's hearts the truth of a living God. As to what, indeed, was the precise nature of the intercourse between Adam and his Maker, before sin made

Gen. ii. 8. him hide himself *from the presence of God amongst the trees of the garden,* it is easier to speculate than to prove. He heard a

voice, but did he see a similitude? When he fled, was it from a face, on which he had been wont to look, or from a Holiness, which he had learned to fear? How, further, God told Noah to make the ark, or bade Abram leave his father's house, or spoke with Moses by the burning bush, Scripture does not explain. Sometimes we read of visions, as when Abram sat in his tent-door in the heat of the day; or of dreams, as when God showed to Nebuchadnezzar what He was about to do to him; or of similitudes, as when Moses and Aaron *saw the God of Israel, and there was under His feet, as it were, a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in His clearness.* Exod. xxiv. 10. When Israel came out of Egypt, the cloud by day and the flame by night were the visible guarantees of the blessed promise: *My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest.* Exod. xxxiii. 14. For the one promise, by which God ever strengthened the hearts of His servants, whether patriarchs, or prophets, or kings, was the distinct assurance of His Divine presence, saying to Isaac, *I will be with thee.* and to Gen. xxvi. 3.

Gen. xxviii. 15. Jacob, *Behold, I am with thee,* and to Moses,
Exod. iii. 12. *Certainly I will be with thee,* and to Jeremiah,
Jer. i. 8. *I am with thee to deliver thee.* While of
2 Kings xviii. 7. Hezekiah it was written, *The Lord was with him;* and it was David's joyful
Psalm cxxxix. 18. boast, *When I awake I am still with Thee.*

When Christ came, for a brief interval which cut the world's life into two distinct
1 Tim. iii. 16. halves, God was *manifest in the flesh.* Surely it is most instructive to observe how, by His words before His resurrection, and His acts after it, He prepared the Church for His protracted absence. The outward symbols of bread and wine, in the solemnly-instituted sacrament of the Lord's supper, while they convey to faithful partakers the blessed sustenance of His spiritual body and blood, are also to enable His followers to realise, when they receive it, the fact of His continual presence in their hearts. Of all His many hard words to His disciples, none were so hard as those in which He strove to assure them that His going away would be for their gain, no explanation at first so disappointing as that by which He maintained it. He was going away, but He

was coming back. The world should not see Him, but they should see Him, and their joy should abide. It was not, however, to be a mere sight of the senses, as it was then, but the beholding of Him by faith in the power of the Spirit. His coming back to be with them was not so much His return to the world for forty short days, but His coming with His Father to those, who loved His words, to take up an abode in their hearts. *Abide in me, and I in you.* Henceforward the John xv 4. life of the Church was to be His ever-present absence. Those manifold and abrupt appearances and disappearances after the resurrection were not merely to show by many infallible proofs, that He was risen from the dead, but by a process of kind weaning to prepare them for the time when He would have ascended into His glory. He would teach them that He was always at hand, though they did not see Him; always thinking of them and watching over them, though He might seem to be far away; absent in the body, He was present in the spirit, and in the fulness of His Divine power, He would not

leave them orphans, He would come to them. The vision of the glorified Saviour at the right hand of God nerved Stephen to die. To St Paul at Corinth, set in the midst of great dangers, the Lord spake in a vision: *Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace, for I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee.* The tradition of paradise is also the hope of glory. Interrupted by the fall, and restored by the cross, it will be perfected in the resurrection. The Revelation, which in the beginning tells us how the beloved apostle in Patmos fell down as dead before the excellent glory of Jesus, in the end assures us, that in the new Jerusalem, *they shall see His face, and His name shall be in their foreheads.* We shall not fear Him then, for *perfect love casteth out fear:* and His presence will not only be a spiritual nearness to soiled and earthly hearts little capable of it, little thankful for it, but the unveiled face of the Lamb, which is in the midst of the throne.

Acts xviii. 9, 10.

Rev. xxii. 4.

1 John iv. 18.

The Gospel.

The practical difficulty, however, is to take these truths for our own, and to live daily in the strength of them. The first question in

theology is the nature of God, but the second is His relationship to mankind. On this latter point the Gospel gives us all the light we possess, and, glorious as it is, it may be described in two sentences: GOD IS RECONCILED, FOR MAN IS REDEEMED. God is reconciled, not because sin is made light of or forgotten; but because it has been expiated at an infinite cost, in the person of His only-begotten Son. The Gospel is the good news of the reconciliation to all men everywhere; and the men who are commissioned to declare it to their fellows convey the *word of reconciliation*, praying men in Christ's stead to be *reconciled to God.* 2 Cor. v. 19, 20.

Doubtless there is still a barrier between a holy God and His sinful creatures: but it is not on God's side, or of God's making; it is on man's side, and of man's making. God must ever hate sin with a perfect hatred, and He can have no truce with it in any man; and wherever He sees it, while His desire is to pardon it, His purpose also is to uproot it and put it away. Yet He has proclaimed by every means in His power, that a way is now

made open into His presence, by the precious blood of His dear Son; and He would have us see and confess, that the only thing that keeps us apart is not His refusal to be reconciled to us, but ours to be reconciled to Him.

Now, to put it roughly, quite apart from any love of sin in us, or any wilful resistance to God's Word, there are two chief obstacles to our receiving the Gospel.

The first difficulty is in our accepting it precisely as God himself describes it. It is so marvellous in its history, so universal in its application, so mighty in its blessedness, so utterly unlike and beyond anything that we could have imagined or invented for ourselves, that while one man denounces it as insulting to the Divine holiness, another resents it as an encouragement to human presumption, and a third, thinking it too good to be true, goes on to argue that therefore it cannot be.

Some, again, refuse to receive it, as God bids them, in the light of a free and unmerited gift; either because they are unwilling to be so cheaply saved, without cost or effort of their

own, or in a spirit of timidity which says, "If all this is true, and the truer it is the more I wish for it, still how may I satisfy myself that it is really meant for me, and that I may freely claim it as my own."

To both these difficulties (to which allusion will again be made in this chapter) a complete answer is to be found in the Twenty-third Psalm.

Christian Assurance.

CHRISTIAN assurance is a humble but firm sense of present acceptance with God in His Son Jesus Christ. It is a doctrine which does not indeed always receive the consideration it deserves from good and thoughtful men. Yet it is so essentially bound up with our ideas of God and our interpretation of Scripture; it bears so directly on our daily religious life, whether held in sober cheerfulness or in ignorant presumption; in plain truth, it has so much to do with our happiness, and therefore with our usefulness and our holiness, that, on the threshold of a subject which cannot possibly be explained or understood without some reference to it, it

may be well for us to try to think out, what it really means.

Objections to it. For we may regard it either with contempt, or with dislike, or with timidity, or with thankfulness. Those who regard all religious consciousness whatever as a hysterical pietism will of course ignore it as folly, or denounce it as fanaticism. With other arguments, from other standing points, we must approach minds like these. Such persons, however, cannot escape the difficulty of finding some better interpretation of the numberless passages of Scripture which both express and imply it; and they may fairly be invited to explain, in what consists the unreasonableness of our wishing to ascertain if the greatest blessing, a human being can possess, is ours or not.

Dislike to it is commonly based on the supposed presumptuousness of venturing to interpret God's hidden purposes, and of taking the keys of the kingdom of heaven out of His hands into our own. Forgiveness, men may say, is not so cheaply, nor so hastily, granted. There must be time to test the sincerity and

to confirm the repentance. It dilutes the malignity of sin to make pardon too easy. It confers impunity on sinners, if we permit personal feeling to be the guarantee of the favour of God. At the close of life God may possibly reward a long penitence by the vision of His reconciled countenance; but really-humbled men will be content to walk softly all their days under the shade of the cross, hoping for mercy when they die.

To this it may be replied in passing, that it is not our own notion of what God's character ought to be, that may safely guide us in this matter; it is His own account of it, as He gives it us in His Word. If Christ our Lord is the same to-day that He was yesterday, it will be His rule now as when He was on earth, if He forgives men, to tell them so. We should all think it cruelty in a human parent to refuse to tell a penitent child that it is forgiven. But as the heavens are high above the earth, so is the pitifulness of God compared with that of men.

Those, again, who regard it with timidity, or a kind of softened distrust, mostly so

regard it, not so much from any sense of inherent impossibility in God to forgive instantly or entirely, as from a real feeling (deepened, it may be, by a painful and long experience) of the deceitfulness of human nature, the shallowness of human feeling, and the weakness of human strength. It is not that they dishonour God by doubting His mercy, or misrepresent Him through ignorance of His Word; but, knowing that they cannot deserve pardon, they fear they may fail to obtain it; confession with the lips is easy, with the heart is hard.

Most true. Yet, if God is willing to forgive us, may we not forgive ourselves? A very slender knowledge of human nature (quite apart from the gospel) is sufficient to assure us that there is no real spur to amendment, no genuine encouragement to new and persevering effort, without a reasonable hope that the past will be forgotten, and the old favour and kindness restored. Alienation and distrust sadden the soul and weaken it; while confidence and esteem brace and ennoble it.

Once more there are those who, grounding it on God's express revelation of Himself, both in His Word and in their own moral nature, unhesitatingly and joyfully recognise it as the mainspring of their obedience and joy. They are careful, indeed, to distinguish between the rash religionism that asserts it to be necessary to salvation, and the sober experience that declares it essential to peace. For the one foundation of Christian assurance is the person and character of God. It is not so much what we are that we rest on, as what He is. He gives, and we receive. He declares, and we listen. He promises, and we believe. If our hearts deceive us, He *is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things*; but if we pray not to be deceived, if we love the truth and wish to know it, will He give us over to believe a lie? If there is danger of presumption in our being too hasty to take God at His word, is there no danger of it in our doubting if He really means what He says? Is there no dishonour to Him, when we dwarf His infinite perfections by trying to make

True idea of it.

1 John iii. 20.

His readiness to pardon fit in with ours? If through ignorance or hardness we are slow ourselves to forgive others, does that make Him like us?

This Twenty-third Psalm is the Old Testament doctrine on this most blessed subject. In revealing the person of God, in describing His relation to us under an endearing and familiar image, it teaches us to rest the hope of our salvation, not on our own changeful and erring frames and feelings, but on Divine love. The New Testament tells us of three kinds of assurance: *the full assurance of understanding; the full assurance of faith; the full assurance of hope unto the end.* Though sooner or later they almost imperceptibly blend into each other, there is nevertheless a real distinction between them, and in a logical order they approach and possess the soul. That order is plainly discernible in this verse, which is a confession of the first assurance of a believing soul; in other words, its starting-point in that knowledge of God which alone is eternal life. *The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.*

Col. ii. 2.
Heb. x. 22.
Heb. vi. 11.

LET us observe here three distinct ideas. *Varieties of Assurance.* The soul's discovery of God, or THE FULL ASSURANCE OF UNDERSTANDING. Its discovery of God's personal relation to itself, or THE FULL ASSURANCE OF FAITH. Its confidence resulting from that discovery, or THE FULL ASSURANCE OF HOPE UNTO THE END.

The discovery of God is the discovery of His name. In a sense, God is His name. Here Jehovah calls Himself a shepherd, not for the first time, nor for the last. So Jacob had already called Him on his death-bed: *From thence is the Shepherd, the stone of Israel.* Gen. xlix. 24. Thus Asaph addresses Him in prayer: *Give* Psalm lxxx. 1 *ear, O Shepherd of Israel, Thou that leadest Joseph like a flock.* Zechariah, approaching the advent, applied it to Messiah: *Awake, O sword, against my Shepherd.* In the New Testament, it is the title of the Lord Jesus. Of Himself the Saviour said, *I am the good Shepherd.* In the Hebrews we read of Him as *the great Shepherd of the sheep;* and St Heb. xiii. 20. Peter, specially impressed it may be by the figure from having been himself thrice bidden

to feed the sheep and the lambs, in one
1 Pet. ii. 25. place describes the Lord as *the Shepherd and*
1 Pet. v. 4. *Bishop of our souls;* in another as *the chief Shepherd.*

Now when we think of the confused, ignorant, defective way in which many men think and speak of God, how thankful we should be for this blessed name, on which to rest our own hearts, under which to speak of Him to others. He is, indeed, the Almighty Maker of all things, who can create and destroy. Yet mere sense of power never made a penitent yet. To confine our notion of God to that of a mighty artificer, is to ignore His moral attributes and to place His redeemed creatures on the same level with the earth and the sea and the trees. Doubtless, also, He is
Psalm lxxv. 7. a judge, who *putteth down one, and setteth up another.* Yet if He is ONLY this, what hope is there for us? From the great white throne the heavens and the earth will flee away.
Hosea xi. 4. The word SHEPHERD draws us *with cords of a man* to One who can save as well as condemn, for it includes KNOWLEDGE, and PROTECTION, and PROVISION, and TENDERNESS.

First, there is individual knowledge. In Europe, where a shepherd rules by fear, not by love, drives his flock in front of him instead of going first himself to show the way, it is hard to appreciate this. In the East it is far otherwise; to borrow the Saviour's words, the shepherd *calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice.* John x. 3, 4. Then the shepherd must protect his sheep, sometimes at great risk to himself, often with labour and fatigue. In the snow-drifts of winter he must dig them out; in the heats of summer they would die of drought if he did not find them water; in the stormy wind and tempest he leads them under the cover of the sheltering hill. The wolf would come and scatter the sheep, if the shepherd were not ready to lay down his life for them. The shepherd knows his sheep, protects them, provides for them, not only because they are his property, and worth so much money, but because he loves them. This idea is beautifully brought out by Isaiah

Isa. xl. 11. in reference to Christ: *He shall feed his flock like a shepherd; He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.* It has been strikingly observed that, in that wandering, dangerous life where the shepherd and the sheep pass days and weeks together without seeing any other living creatures than themselves, there springs up a kind of friendship between the man and the brute. The shepherd feels a pitiful love to the dumb, helpless creatures, whom the Maker of man and beast has given into his hand. The sheep come at last to connect him with their daily food and safety, and in their way look up to him with a dependant grateful affection.

Such then being the office and qualities of a good shepherd, this illustration may help to show us, though in a very imperfect way, what Christ is to His Church. He knows His sheep, every one of them, from the least to the greatest. Each has his own name, each his own place in the family of God. *I know my sheep, and am known of mine.* And He

John x. 14.

protects them. Not, however, by securing them immunity from "the changes and chances" of life. It would be but a poor manifestation of Divine wisdom and mercy, to shelter us from that discipline of trial and sorrow by which the elect of God are trained for home. But in the temptations of Satan, whether they be doubts that undermine our faith, or sudden assaults that would take it by storm, or anodynes that send it to sleep, or allurements that enchant it, *the name of the* Prov. xviii. 10. *Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it and is safe.* And He provides for them. The Son of man, who once taught us to say, *Give us day by day our daily bread,* Luke xi. 3. now hears that prayer, and Himself answers it from heaven. And as for love! How Christ can love, with all the strength of Godhead, with all the sympathy of manhood, let those try to say who have once felt it, let those ask for it, who desire to know what it can be. The love of God is a boundless ocean, with neither breadth, nor length, nor depth, nor height; and while we timidly stand on the shore, and only suffer the

rippling waves to cover our feet, instead of bravely plunging in, and trusting all our life, all our happiness, to it, we can know but little of what it must be to saints and angels.

BUT the verse does not merely say, *The Lord is* a *shepherd*, it says, *The Lord is* MY *shepherd.* This is a step further in the soul's discovery of God. If, as we have already seen, there are three kinds of assurance, and the assurance of understanding comes first; in this assurance of understanding again, there are two steps or growths of knowledge: one, the abstract discovery of what God is in Himself; the other, the actual apprehension of what He is to those who love Him.

For the former, so far from being necessarily connected with the latter, is often separated from it by a long and painful interval. Like a starving man gazing through a window on a well-spread board at which he dare not go in to sit down, the soul that seeks God, but has not yet found

Him, may, as we have already hinted, appreciate with fatal distinctness the riches of His grace and the counsel of His love for others; and yet, through hearing without believing, may find its own burden only more insupportable than before. It reasons thus: I know what God is in Himself, and what He is to His people, but how can I induce Him to be all that to me? *Where-* Micah vi. 6.
with shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God. Clearly I must in some way obtain His love, whether by prayers or alms or sorrow. Who then shall tell me when I have wept or prayed enough to pay up in full the purchase-money of my Redeemer's pity? When may I dare to say, as I hear others saying, "Jesus Christ is for me?" When will He say to me, as once He said to another, *Thy sins are for-* Luke vii. 48.
given.

It is something indeed to have got so far as this, even to understand Christ's work, and to desire a share in it. Yet such an one only sees men as trees walking; and, while looking through a mist at the letter of the

gospel, staggers heavily on under the burden of the law.

Now the message of the gospel to the soul in such a condition is this: "He is yours, my friend, simply because He tells you so; and what you have to do about it is to believe." Faith, no doubt, is capable of many and various definitions; and there are different aspects and phases of it, which one man may call love, and another repentance; but the one result in every case is just coming to Christ for life. TO BELIEVE IS THE FIRST DUTY OF MAN. The one essential truth to accept about the gospel is, that no money can buy our salvation, no suffering merit it, no repentance procure it, no holiness produce it. The utmost that our own moral action can do for us, and this too is by the grace of God, is to create and enlarge the receptive faculty in us. If we will not take salvation as a gift, we cannot have it at all.

The last step, and that which alone completes our knowledge of God, is to be able to say, I know both what God is in Himself, and what He can be to His

people, not from books, nor from hearsay, nor merely from His account of Himself in His Word, but simply from what He has Himself been to me. I am not reasoning myself into what I ought to feel; I feel from what I possess, and what no man can take from me, for no man gave it to me. The Lord is my shepherd, for He has been a shepherd to me. Not only from what He has promised, but also from what He has performed, I know in whom I have believed. And a blessed truth it is, when God the Holy Ghost writes it on the soul. The Saviour is mine, and I am His: all to me that a shepherd can be to a sheep, all to me that God can be to a creature. He thinks of me, He cares for me, He shelters me, He understands me. He is as much and as really mine as if I were at this moment with Him in heaven, *faultless before the presence of His glory.* Jude 24.

Once more, as the result of this discovery is the soul's confidence, *I shall not want.* The positiveness of this sentence is as striking as its comprehensiveness. It is not

the utterance of a prayer, it is the statement of a conviction; while memory unlocks the treasures of past mercy, hope reposes itself on the unchangeableness of God.

And if it is positive, it is "exceeding broad." *I shall not want.* The psalmist, we observe, did not even think it worth while to specify any of the things he was likely to want. Every need of his life seemed absolutely guaranteed to him as he rested under the wing of God. SECURITY? *The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.* PROVISION? *He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?* GRACE? *My grace is sufficient for thee.* LOVE? That deepest, most unutterable, most insatiable of all the needs of man! When God can be faint or weary, when He can turn His face from the poor destitute in anger or scorn, when He can grow cold towards those, whom He has loved and redeemed and called, then our doubts and fears may have some foundation. But to think that God can change, is to

Deut. xxxiii. 27.

Rom. viii. 32.

2 Cor. xi. 9.

deny that He is God. *For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.* Mal. iii. 6.

Oh blessed truth of the sufficiency and faithfulness of God; would we but let it possess our hearts! Whatever our needs, He can supply them, for He is God; He will supply them, for He is love. Incessant as may be our wants, small and trifling as may be our cares, harassing and anxious, as with the manliest and strongest of us, this daily earthly life must sometimes be, the Son of God is still Son of man. In His own human nature, glorified indeed, yet human still, human always, *He ever liveth to make intercession for us.* Heb. vii. 25. *We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.* Heb. iv. 15.

Only let us believe, and our joy shall be full. Let us honour God by trusting Him entirely. Let us be as willing to receive as He is willing to bestow. Let us give Him the only thing in the world He cares for; the only thing we have to give Him worth giving;

the only thing He will not take by force, for unless given freely it is worthless; the very same gift that He has Himself first given us, only it does not seem worth our looking at—even the heart: and then, not in a greater willingness on His part to bestow, but in a greater capacity on ours to accept, the Lord will be our shepherd. He will possess what He died to win; we shall be the dwelling-place of God.

TWO thoughts more will tolerably complete this part of our subject. Christ is a shepherd for all who wish for Him. Christ is a shepherd for all possible conditions of place, and age, and time.

The former of these truths is good to kindle hope in hearts, which have grown sick over the deferred conversion of children or friends, may even possibly stir a movement of faith and repentance in a soul now half paralysed by the thought that it is cast away.

Testimony of Scripture.

It is wonderful how fertile the human heart can be in inventing reasons why God should

not save us; it is equally wonderful how the blessed Saviour anticipated all such reasons during His ministry on earth. Is it said, "I am lost"? *The Son of man is come to save* Matt. xviii. 11 *that which was lost.* Is it said, "I can give no reason why God should save me, except that I wish to be saved"? *Ho, every one that* Isa. lv. 1. *thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money: come ye, buy and eat: yea, come, buy wine and milk without money, and without price.* Is it said, "God requires faith, and to believe is just the one thing I cannot do, for I am full of doubts and difficulties"? *Come* Matt. xi. 28. *unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.* Is it said, either of one by himself, or by others about him, "There is no fear, no desire, no care about these things in that soul. Would there were —for then he might flee from the wrath to come. But now, how can we hope; what can we do for him"? The answer is, "That soul is redeemed, for Jesus died to save it. Wait and pray." The angel's message to the shepherds at Bethlehem is perhaps the fullest, freest gospel ever preached to man. Let us

Luke ii. 10, 11. learn it by heart. *Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.* Not a merited, not a purchased, but a BORN Saviour: not only for Jews at Bethlehem, but for all people everywhere: on whom the single claim for mercy is our lost humanity, with whom the only condition is, *Come unto me.*

Matt. xi. 28.

And if the Word of God is not sufficient to give confidence—not through any doubting of its truth or blessedness, but through the inability of the soul to appropriate it to its own needs—two points still deserve to be suggested; for we know not *whether shall prosper either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good.*

Eccles. xi. 6.

Of the Church. One of them is a fact, visible before our eyes everywhere, even the Church of God. As an external witness to the historical truth of Christianity, the mere existence of the Church, apart from any explanation of it, has yet to be appreciated at its full value. If Mohammedanism is a testimony to the existence of Mohammed, Christianity is a

monument to the memory of Christ. Our present object is, however, to consider it, in the visible body of its faithful and living members, as an evidence of the mercy of God. The Church, in one aspect, is a portion of redeemed humanity saved in Christ for ever; it is the possession of Christ, already purchased by His blood, and presently to be ransomed from death in the resurrection unto life. And the question to ask is, If we behold here an evident purpose of God to save some, why, my brother, or my sister, should not that purpose extend to you? Why should not you be among those whom God will glorify? Why should you be shut out from the benefits of that cross and passion endured for the sins of the whole world? If no one has come from heaven to tell you that you are to be saved, no one has come to any one else to tell them so. Certainly no one has come to tell you that you are to be lost. Even if you were a heathen, and had only just heard of Christ, that would be no bar to your salvation. Every man and woman

on this redeemed earth may plead the Saviour's name with the Father who gave Him, and need not fear to plead in vain.

Of Baptism. But to be in the Church of God is to have a special invitation to His mercy; and just as every circumcised Jew was justified in regarding himself as one of God's peculiar people, so every baptized Christian may plead the name which is above every name, as the name by which he himself is called. Whatever may be the difficulties of belief, or the diversities of doctrine about holy baptism, (and they chiefly spring from the silence of Scripture about the baptism of infants,) if we believe anything about it, surely we must believe that it brings us into a more visible relation to God than we were in before; that if it binds us to filial obedience, it pledges Him to fatherly love; that if it is a responsibility, it must also be a privilege; that if it is a reality and not a mockery, it must be a sign of His readiness to save. If we believe more than this about baptism, as some doubtless do, then the argument for pleading it with God is made so much the

stronger. If we believe less than this, surely we are inconsistent in accepting infant baptism at all. *Whatsoever is not of faith is sin;* and rather than treat one of Christ's holy sacraments as a mere act of ecclesiastical registration, let us altogether postpone it till our riper years. Well, then, if any one doubts God's mercy towards him, or towards one he loves, let such a one, with all reverence, but with all simplicity and earnestness, plead this baptism with God. Let him say, "Lord, Thou hast begun the work, wilt not Thou finish it? Thou didst look on me in favour, when I could not with my own lips pray to Thee. Now that I ask of Thee Thy favour for myself, wilt Thou send me empty away? If I do not deserve Thy mercy now, I did not deserve it then. Hast Thou kindled hopes only to disappoint them? Hast Thou taught me to call Thee Father, only to refuse to own me as a child? I ask for Thy love and for Thy grace, that I may walk humbly with Thee as a son with a parent. Not because I have a right to it, but because Thou hast promised it to them

Rom. xiv. 23.

that ask Thee, give me Thy free, Thy full salvation."

Once more, the briefest glance at this psalm may satisfy us, that it traces David's history over his entire life; and so far from being the sudden voice of a youthful enthusiasm, is the profound experience of gray hairs.

The Lord Jesus Christ is a friend for life. For all its seasons, whether youth, or manhood, or old age; for all its risings and fallings, its losses and gains, its joys and cares, His brotherly sympathy is ready, and entire and full. To wish to shut Him out of any part of our life, or any possession of our heart, or any crisis of our history, or any secret of our experience, is to grieve Him—is yet more to impoverish ourselves.

And if this is the area of our privilege, it is the condition of our peace. No doubt it is a solemn thing, if we adequately grasp it, to take the Lord Jesus Christ with us wherever we go, to surrender to Him whatever we possess, to consult Him in whatever we do. Yet life will be less frivolous if we try to live it under

His eye. It need not be less happy, for He who gave His presence at the marriage-feast in Cana recognises and sanctifies all human and innocent joy. *The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want:* here is at once our safeguard, our dignity, our gladness. How can we fear anything, how can we miss anything, when God and Christ are ours?

II.

DIVINE PROVIDENCE.

II.

DIVINE PROVIDENCE.

"HE MAKETH ME TO LIE DOWN IN GREEN PASTURES: HE LEADETH ME BESIDE THE STILL WATERS."

> "*God governs this world, governs you and me, down to the very depths of our being. And we possess the power of choosing right and wrong: right, by the grace of God, and wrong by our failing to use that grace; and as responsible for such a power we shall be summoned at last before the judgment-seat of Christ.*"—ARCHBISHOP THOMSON.

Nature of the subject.

WHAT do we mean by Divine Providence? Is it foresight, or is it government? Is it an interruption of order, or is it included in the order which it may be supposed to interrupt? Where does it begin, and where does it end? What does it include, and what does it exclude? Is it special as well

as general, or does the general providence contain and imply the special? Is it for individuals as well as for nations, and for heathens as well as for Christians, and for bad as well as for good men? Does it operate on us irresistibly, or are we free to go our own way if we please? Are there any outward signs or tokens by which we can infallibly discover its leadings? and if not, what is our best way for ascertaining them?

Put in its plainest and broadest form, the one question underlying the whole matter is simply this—"What is God willing to be to us in our daily life?" and precisely in proportion to the importance of the subject is the desirableness of thinking clearly, as well as feeling heartily with respect to it.

Now on almost all the questions already suggested the second verse of the twenty-third psalm throws light. First, it teaches us that the fountain of Divine Providence is not a blind fate, but a living and personal God, holding our world and all in it in His own right hand, the Lord and King of men. *He maketh me to lie down: He leadeth me.*

If the New Testament tells us of a personal Saviour, the Old Testament tells us of a personal God. This was indeed the essential strength of the ancient Hebrew faith: and though some narrowed it into the intolerance and exclusiveness of denying to the rest of mankind the care, or even the notice, of Jehovah, they intensified it as few Christians do now. It was the promise of God to Abram: *I will make of thee a great nation,* Gen. xii. 2. *and I will bless thee, and make thy name great.* It was the conviction that possessed Hagar's soul when the angel found her in the wilderness: *Thou, God, seest me.* It was the sub- Gen. xvi. 13. stance of Jacob's vow after the vision at Bethel: *If God will be with me, and will keep* Gen. xxviii. 20, *me in this way that I go, and will give me* 21. *bread to eat and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then shall the Lord be my God.* It was the Divine message to Israel in Egypt by the hand of Moses: *I have surely visited you, and seen* Exod. iii. 16, *that which is done to you in Egypt, and I have* 17. *said I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt.* The Psalms are more or less the

repetition, under every form of expression and every variety of experience, of the psalmist's personal and abiding consciousness of a God above him and around him, ruling the world for his sake, covering his head in the day of battle, listening to his prayers, putting his tears into His bottle, keeping him as the apple of an eye. In the mystical language of the Canticles it is expressed by the idea of a mutual and personal possession: Cant. ii. 16. *My beloved is mine, and I am His.* Yet neither David nor Solomon can surpass the impassioned tenderness of the language in which Jeremiah describes the origin, and explains the proof of it: Jer. xxxi. 3. *I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee.*

Divine Providence to be viewed in the light of Divine Sovereignty.

And here let us remember that we must not try, we must not even wish, to separate from this great truth of a living, personal, Divine Ruler, the equally great, equally indisputable truth of a living, personal, Divine and sovereign will. If man could not be man without a will, how could God be God? Why are some of us so afraid of the

sovereignty of God? Surely much of such fear must spring from ignorance of His nature; much of it, also, from doubts of His goodness. Separate, indeed, will from character; and then the more irresistible the will, the more terrible may be its results. Nothing in all the world is so intelligible or so reasonable as devil worship, if the only God we know of is a vindictive and cruel tyrant never to be appeased but by blood and pain. But our God is a Father. *And the Lord descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. . . . The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty.* He is a Father, both merciful and holy; merciful because He is holy, and holy because He is merciful; whose sovereignty is but the exercise of His mercy; for all *the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth unto such as keep His covenant and His testimonies.* Yet He is never indulgent to sin in any one; He never

Exod. xxxiv. 5-7.

Psalm xxv. 10.

passes by those who wilfully persevere in it, whoever they be; He hastens rather, out of very love to them, to deliver them out of it.

Psalm xi. 7. *The righteous Lord loveth righteousness; His countenance doth behold the upright.*

Therefore, if we look at Divine Providence in the light of the Divine sovereignty, and then contemplate the Divine sovereignty, whether as a general, universal truth, or in its application to our individual case, in the light of the Divine character, instead of being startled by it, or never venturing to allude to it save with hushed breath, we shall come to look on it not only as one of the attributes of God, but even as displaying the glory of His infinite righteousness: we shall exclaim, with

Rom. xi. 33. the apostle, *Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!* Divine Providence is the acting of Divine will; a will irresponsible save to the harmony of its own perfections, irresistible in the final result of its eternal purpose, though rather through the wise combination of various and even opposing forces, than by limiting the freedom and so destroying the responsibility of men;

a will, on which the sheep of the Good Shepherd repose the assurance of their certain, because predestined, glory; a will which is the mainspring of all godly zeal for the salvation of others, since He *will have all men to be saved, and to come to a knowledge of the truth;* a will, which now, whatever it may be, we must learn to trust, and to do, and to love, and to suffer; and about which our daily prayer must be, that it may be done on earth as it is done in Heaven.

1 Tim. ii. 11.

AND this brings us to the second point in the verse, the result of this Divine Providence: *Green pastures and still waters,* or, as Mr Perowne more exactly renders it, "pastures of grass and waters of refreshment."

Result of Divine Providence,—

The imagery of the verse sketches for us the pleasant picture of long waving grass in rich meadows, where the tired sheep can lie down, sheltered from the burning sun, and browsing as they lie. We seem also to see glimmering in the thick heat the still deep pool of cool water, not bubbling noisily over

rough stones, and baulking with its shallowness the eager thirst of the impatient flock, but accessible, abundant, satisfying. Taken out of its figure the verse assures us that there is always abundance, always refreshment, if we are walking in the ways of God. What a truth this is, if we could take it altogether for our own. It is true under all circumstances, if we meet them and bear them in the right spirit: it is true at all times and seasons, in all places and countries; for Joseph in prison, for Moses at Horeb, for Elijah by Cherith, for Paul at Rome, for John Bradford at the stake, for solitary Henry Martyn in the Gulf of Persia, for Richard Williams in Patagonia, offering up his life to God, for Robert Hall in his Cambridge study, rolling in bitter pain. In David's way of putting it, *the Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want, for he leadeth me to the pastures that are green, and to the waters that are still.* In St Paul's way of putting it,

Phil iv. 19. it is, *My God shall supply all your need, according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.*

But here some one will ask, "Is this always true? Ought it to be always true? Does any one on earth so find it? Are there no exceptions to the rule which prove it and maintain it? Has not the soul, like the earth, its appointed changes, and its needful alternations of heat and cold, of day and night, of summer and winter, of drought and rain? For indeed my own experience is, that the pasture is not always green, the water is not always still for me: and tell me if this may not sometimes be God's own will about me, and not, of necessity, through my own sin?"

In its general and final tendency.

Now, in the first place, the verse does not so much express the uniform and unvarying present effect of Divine Providence, as its general purpose and tendency in the end. To borrow two illustrations, one from the imagery of the Psalm, the other from the actual dealings of God with Israel: when it comes to pass that the grass is all eaten, and the pool filled by the winter rains drunk up, the sheep must change their place of pasture, and while on the road from the old halting-

place to the new, instead of rich herbage and cool springs, there may be a glaring and waterless plain. Israel in the wilderness had to pass Marah on their road to Elim: and they could not stay at Elim long, for they were on their march to Canaan. Under such circumstances, memory and hope are the springs of action; the sheep have still their shepherd leading them, the believer still is safe under the wing of his God. There are times (and when we look back at them, we see they were blessed times) when Christ Himself is felt to be our only food and joy and stay and friend; when, in the weariness of our life's journey, and in the entire drying up of the wells of human gladness, we fall back on Him, the shepherd of our souls, that He Himself alone and entirely may be our "pastures of grass and our waters of refreshment." We learn then, what afterwards we never quite forget, how to refer all things to Him and to take all things from Him: we understand then how the psalmist could say, nay (though humbly and timidly,) we venture to say it after him, *Whom have I in heaven*

Ps. lxxiii. 25.

but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee.

Another truth, however, claims to be heard here, and of an importance which it is impossible to over-estimate: namely, that the abundance and refreshment spoken of in this place are not only material but moral; in other words, they are not so much, perhaps not so frequently, in the nature of outward circumstances, as in repose and contentment of heart. For Divine Providence means the arrangement of *all* our life, not only of its bright side, but also of its dark. It may mean sickness as well as health; death as well as life; loss as well as gain; peril as well as safety; shipwreck by sea and accident by land; murrain to our flocks; sickness in our homes. There is no immunity for one man more than another from troubles of this kind, whatever his errand, whatever his character. St Paul himself tells us that he *thrice suffered shipwreck*, and peril of all kinds was the unvarying feature of his missionary journeys. It neither honours God, nor trusts Him, nor rightly interprets Him, to receive

Moral, not only material.

2 Cor. xi. 25.

good at His hand and not to receive evil. To let God choose for us and to be satisfied with His choice, here is the secret of peace.

Isa. xxx. 15. *In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength.* To be a sheep of the Good Shepherd, to be a child of the Eternal Father, to be a subject of the heavenly kingdom, to be an heir of the exceeding weight of glory, is to have the machinery of the Divine government for our protection, the resources of the Divine treasury for our provision; now the love of God for our possession, presently the vision of God for our reward. All that God is, all that God has, is for His people. The outward features of our life may not be all that we should choose them to be; there may be things we wish for that never come to us; there may be much we wish away, that we cannot part from. The persons with whom we live, the circumstances by which we are surrounded, the duties we have to perform, the burdens we have to bear, may not only be other than what we should have selected for ourselves,

but may even seem inconsistent with that formation and discipline of character which we honestly wish to promote. But it is faith that overcomes the world, not a sense of enjoyment. The end of life is not personal happiness; it is the image and glory of God. We need not envy others what God has given them and denied us, as if He were hard to us and kind to them. The same love that has in this instance given them what was safe for them, and denied us what was not safe for us, has, we may be quite sure, also denied to them in other instances blessings, which they wish for but may not have, and the enjoyment of which they behold and envy in ourselves. God is just in His ways with all men; but He is also wise and kind; and knowing us better than we know ourselves, fully understanding how greatly we are affected by the outward events and conditions of life, He has ordered them with a view to our entire and final, not only our immediate, happiness; and whenever we can be safely trusted with pastures that are green and waters that are still in the way of

earthly blessing, the Good Shepherd leads us there.

Sometimes accompanied with Sorrow.

Once more, to point somewhat higher, and to indicate yet another aspect of Providence, which to some may seem so far above them that they can never reach it; it is often God's way with those who love Him best, not as a chastisement for sin (on which something will be said in the next chapter), but as a distinction and a privilege, to teach them the fellowship of Christ's sufferings, and so to make them more conformable to His death. Our Blessed Master, *though He were a son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered.* How does St Paul describe his own life—a life, after that of his Lord, perhaps the very noblest and hardest and most successful life ever yet lived on this earth? *In all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings.* It is an utter, nay, a dishonest, confusion of terms, to say that these things can be

Heb. v. 8.

2 Cor. vi. 4, 5.

in themselves pleasant to us, or otherwise, at the moment we feel them, than grievous and burdensome. Pain, hunger, isolation, misrepresentation, disappointment, mockery? To speak of such things, even when endured for Christ's sake, as green pastures and still waters, is to call evil good and good evil, is to put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. There is no evading the meaning of Christ's words, *If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.* St Paul bore in his body the marks of the Lord Jesus, and those were marks of pain. But does it therefore follow that there was no strength to bear the pain, no blessed consciousness of a divine presence, going with him and giving him rest everywhere? When he fought with wild beasts at Ephesus, was not Jesus with him? When they stoned him at Lystra, was not his soul rejoicing in the thought that tribulation was the way to the kingdom? Therefore though the wilderness is not a green pasture, though sickness is not health, nor toil rest, nor loneliness a troop of friends, nor a prison

Matt. xvi. 24.

cell the liberty and happiness of home, to live may be Christ, anywhere and anyhow. And thus we find the same apostle at one moment describing the sharpness of his outward sufferings, at the next moment the blessedness of his inward peace. *We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed: always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.*

2 Cor. iv. 8–10.

Thus (to recapitulate) we must not so misunderstand God's meaning in this promise as to suppose that the processes of His Providence can always be as pleasant as the result, or that any set of outward circumstances, prosperous and desirable as they may be, can bring us either happiness or blessing, apart from the spirit in which we interpret them, or the character in which they find us; or, once more, that the "green pastures and still waters" may not sometimes to the eye of sense be utterly devoid of all visible and earthly prosperity, when,

for the advancement of Christ's kingdom as well as for his own ultimate glory, the believer, like an apostle before him, fills up *that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ* in his flesh *for His body's sake, which is the Church.* Col. i. 24.

God persuades, instead of compelling.

BUT there is yet another consideration which may even further help to explain to us why the pastures are not always green, the waters not always still.

"He *maketh* me to lie down—he *leadeth* me." The divine government is a moral government; its method is not to compel, but to persuade. The Good Shepherd does not drive but lead, and the sheep follow Him, for they know His voice. The words "maketh them," may indeed sound like compulsion, yet they describe the purpose of His Providence, rather than any forced result of it; and no ingenuity can reconcile the idea of guiding with that of violence. In solemn truth, God's rule is the same in Providence that it is in grace. By any and by all means He will draw us; force us,

never. A thoughtful writer,* recently deceased, has drawn a subtle, but I think a true, distinction between the *will* of God, or what His nature and character would desire as best for us, and the *decrees* of God, as finally accomplishing what was actually possible. As has already been hinted, surely we may see this in the word "lead." No one is compelled to follow a guide. Scripture, again and again, in the Psalms, and in the Prophets, and in the Gospels, introduces the image of wandering and straying sheep; but nowhere is it assumed that the sheep by so straying lost their original relation to their shepherd, or that mere wandering can turn a sheep into a goat. The plain fact is, that Divine Providence is to us just what we suffer it to be; and let any one, who doubts this, read very carefully the last seven verses of the 81st Psalm.

John v. 20. *Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life,* was the pathetic complaint of the Saviour, about those whom He yearned to save, but who would not let Him save them.

John ix. 21. *He is of age, ask him; he shall speak for*

* Professor A. J. Scott.

himself. This, in the first instance, was the reply of the blind man's parents to the Jews. May we not, admitting its abstract and essential justice, apply the words to God, as He considers the actions of men? And if we at first shrink from this view, as on man's side too much aggravating his responsibility, on God's side too little recognising His sovereignty, let us apply two tests to it which, in their combined force, may persuade us of its truth. One is that of conscience, long ago used with irresistible force by Dean Alford in vindicating the human side of the doctrine of predestination; the other is that of experience, which, instead of speculating what men can do, discovers it from their acts.

As we look back at the past, and muse on the share we have ourselves taken in the attainment of our position, in the use of our opportunities, in the improvement of our talents, in the discharge of our duties, is there no feeling of regret, or of loss, or of shame? Have we always honestly consulted God? Have we always obeyed the

voice of conscience? Have we never gone the way of our own heart, though our heart and our judgment were at variance? Do we not sometimes feel that we might have been more happy, more useful, than we are, but for wilful mistakes of our own? In some things, it is true, we are not the makers of our own history. Our birth, our parentage, our natural talent, our bodily shape and constitution, nay, to some extent, our character, are the irreversible and irredeemable lot which He who *worketh all things after the counsel of his own will* ordained for us before the worlds were made. Providence, if we may so speak, gives us our start, and the start tells on the race. *Promotion cometh neither from the east nor from the west, nor from the south.* But it is for us to *run with patience the race that is set before us;* and while our sense of dependence convinces us of the existence of an over-ruling God, and our conscience confesses that we do not always obey Him, our instincts of energy, and self-reliance, and ambition, and enterprise, are indisputable

Eph. i, 11.

Psalm lxxv. 6.

Heb. xii, 1, 2.

evidences of direct responsibility. Gratitude and humility compelled St Paul to say, *By the grace of God I am what I am;* yet the sense of his own use of that grace justified him in adding, *I laboured more abundantly than they all.* 1 Cor. xv. 10.

Divine Providence for Individuals.

THERE is still, however, one other word in this verse which contains a truth as important as any we have yet considered, and which makes all the difference possible, both in our conception of God and in our view of life. It is not *us*, but ME. *He maketh* ME *to lie down—He leadeth* ME. The Psalmist is not describing the care of a shepherd over the entire flock, so much as his care for each individual sheep in it; and the verse recalls the time when he, who was afterwards called from following the ewes great with young *to feed Jacob his people and Israel his inheritance*, was but a humble youth, his sceptre a crook, his subjects goats and sheep and lambs, his dominions wild open fields between Bethlehem and the Kedron. Psalm lxxviii. 71.

The doctrine of a Divine Providence,

whatever we may understand by it, is peculiar to revealed religion. The deities of the Pagan world (as mythology describes them) interfered with the affairs of men only for vice or pride; and the philosophers who found themselves able to acknowledge gods at all, preferred to think of them as dwelling apart from men in a stately and perhaps contemptuous repose.

Barrow, in his famous sermon on the Gunpowder Plot, quotes a sentence of Cicero to the effect that "the gods care for great things and neglect small," a statement to which we should be willing to give more attention if he had gone on to explain, what great and small mean in the affairs of life, and how we are to know when to apply the words. No doctrine more than this one of Divine Providence exalts God or dignifies man. It exalts God in setting forth at once His power and His goodness. It dignifies man in giving to each redeemed human being his own personal and inalienable position in the creation, and by placing the beggar and the king, the little infant and the man in his prime, the

lonely widow and the powerful statesman, the decrepit pauper and the conqueror in a hundred battles, on the same level of entire equality before Him with whom is *no respect of persons.* It is in no feeble, unhealthy, self-loving, self-exalting spirit that a human being, first looking into himself and then looking up towards heaven, should ask, with all reverence, but with all anxiety, "Does God care for me—will God help me?" 2 Chron. xix. 7.

We are all familiar with the suggestive remark that the microscope was discovered about the same time as the telescope: and that the mighty Creator of the innumerable worlds which gem the fields of space, was thus found willing to put forth the resources of His omnipotence, and to exert the secrets of His wisdom, on a drop of water or a butterfly's wing. For no one who believes in a God at all, really disputes His power; there are no degrees of power with Omnipotence. The simple question is, What is the sphere of His power? what the method and the motive of its exercise? Nay, further, any one who believes in God as a moral being, is prepared

to admit the general benevolence of His character, and the wisdom of His universal government; but that is not enough for those whom God has so formed, so disposed, that each needs God for himself. Man is not satisfied to share only, with the beasts and the birds and the trees, a general supervision. Life is too vast, too solemn, to be spent alone. He would come close to God, and feel after Him till he finds Him.

Two questions for consideration.

The subject we are considering actually includes two questions—one of less, the other of greater moment; the one, the use of a word—the other, the meaning of a truth, To take the last first: a Christian does not need to be reminded that He, without whom not a sparrow falleth to the ground, hath numbered the very hairs of his head. We have not so learned Christ from the history of His earthly life—we have not so seen the Father manifested in His Son, as to dare to do Him the crowning dishonour of doubting for a moment His full and tender sympathy for each one of His redeemed people, or of refusing to believe that He, who made the

worlds, watches over a little child. If there is no limitation of infinite power, neither is there any of infinite love. God can, God will, God does care for us. The secrets of nature, the marvels of creation, the mystery of redeeming love, the individual experience of millions upon millions of reflecting and intelligent men,—nay, almost every page of that Book which is luminous with the doctrine of a Divine Providence, and which, if the doctrine be false, must itself be the cruellest delusion that ever mocked mankind, —each of these alone, all of these together, are a witness to the superintendence of God. In all things, and at all times, and for all needs, and under all difficulties, in things temporal and things spiritual, in the necessities of the body and of the soul, in the choice of a profession, in the arrangement of a home, in work and in rest, in study and in holiday, in marrying and in giving in marriage, in the bringing up of children, in the selection of servants, in perplexities of business, in the entanglements of society; however small our cares may be, however

insignificant our condition, however inextricable our confusion, however dark our future, *He knoweth the way that I take.*

Job xxiii. 10.

It is, however, one thing to be infallibly assured of the love and care and protection of God for each human being in all the affairs of life, and another thing to describe this Providence accurately, and to explain it consistently with the other operations of His will.

Meaning of Special Providence.

The word "special," as applied to Providence, is often somewhat loosely used by those who do not sufficiently reflect on the logical consequences of the language they are using, and who, in their intelligible anxiety to recognise and adore the providential care and goodness which from time to time are mercifully conspicuous in their own case, feel tempted to describe it as a peculiar interposition for their sake, when it is but a pre-arranged element in a universal plan.

If we insist on a so-called "Special Providence," as an exception to, and an interruption of, the method of general Pro-

vidence, and on no other ground than that of our own consciousness (more alive to it, or more grateful for it, at some times than at others), it is difficult to evade the objection that with the all-wise, all-seeing God, there can be neither settled purpose nor predestined order; then there is one kind of government over us to-day, called general, and another over us to-morrow, called special. Surely, however, even in admitting the possibility of eccentricity and change in the Divine counsels, we impeach the wisdom, and complicate the operations of God.

For some it is enough to believe that there is one uniform universal government over us all: always the same, always righteous and merciful, by night as well as by day, in quiet times as well as in troubled times, when we are not conscious of it as well as when we are; purposing our good, contriving our happiness, willing our sanctification. And though at some times more than at others we are impressed by its influence, or grateful for its blessings, or solemnised by

its judgments; it is the same government, on the same principles, of the same God, for the same end.

Providence in connection with Prayer.

THE word, however, is but of slight consequence, so long as we rightly grasp the doctrine beneath; and there can be no harm in our using the word "Providential," when speaking familiarly of the Divine dealings, so long as we are careful not to think or speak about ourselves, as if we were the only people in the world God cares for: if also we beware how we recognise His kind and special government only in those features of it which happen to gratify self. The practical result of our belief in Divine Providence is the one thing to inquire about; and whatever our private theory may be, it need not give us uneasiness, and it cannot seriously mislead us, if only it encourages us in prayer.

As has well been said, man is a creature that prays; and whatever may be the speculative difficulties of prayer; however hard some of us may find it to reconcile the notion of prayer moving God with God's infinite

and unerring wisdom; in spite of all the philosophers and the thinkers, men and women will go on praying as they have ever done: and what is more, will refuse to be convinced that their prayers are in vain. In plain truth, all the difficulties on the subject (and there are difficulties) simply and solely spring (as Bishop Butler has observed about revealed religion generally) from our imperfect knowledge of God. A man will say, "Do you really expect an answer to your prayer? For if you do, you are only in other words asking for a miracle." "Well, what if I am? Can you tell me, my friend, what a miracle is, what nature is, what God's order is, what interrupts and what does not interrupt it, what is contrary to it, and what is merely above it, or suspends it?" For it is quite begging the whole question to speak of miracles as something against nature; when possibly, as has been observed,* "they are above it: not the few caprices of Providence breaking in upon ages of order, but glimpses of the Divine spiritual cosmos per-

* "Dictionary of the Bible," vol. ii. p. 1046.

mitted to be seen amidst the laws of the natural world, of which they take precedence, just as in the physical world one law can supersede another."

Let us, further, for a moment reflect on the infinite wisdom of God both in Providence and grace, and consider also on what conditions it is promised, that our prayers shall prevail. *Known unto God are all His works, from the beginning of the world.* To quote language well worth considering: "God has so arranged His Providence, that He provides an answer to prayer. When the question is asked, How does God answer prayer?—it is by a pre-ordained appointment, when God settled the constitution of the world, and set all its parts in order," and "the answer to prayer proceeds on the foreseen circumstance that the prayer will be offered; that if the man refuses to pray, he shall assuredly find it fixed that no answer is given."*

Acts xv. 18.

For, anyhow God has only promised to answer the prayers which are acceptable to

* "Method of the Divine Government," pp. 222, 224.

Himself. *If we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us.* Many of our prayers are not answered, because they are incompatible with our real good. When, however, we pray in the mind of the Spirit (and if we please we always may), then we pray according to the will of God; then we ask and we receive, we seek and we find, we knock and it is opened to us. Dr Barry has observed that the prayers of the patriarchs were principally for personal or domestic blessings; those of Hebrews under the monarchy for national blessings; those of New Testament saints for spiritual blessings. We Christians may surely unite all these varieties of prayer in our own case, some, of course, more at one time than another; remembering that the one thing we have to do is to pray everywhere, to pray always; above all, to *pray and not to faint.* Prayer, rightly understood, is but a child going into a parent's presence, or a loyal subject asking audience of his king; only the parent's heart is always bountiful, the king's sceptre is ever stretched out to-

1 John v. 14.

Luke xv. 1.

wards us to bid us welcome. If there be no Divine Providence, then, indeed, there can be no prayer; and not to pray at all implies either that we have no need of God, or no faith in Him; but just as we trust in the goodness and wisdom of our Maker, will prayer be at once the relief, and the necessity, and the habit, and the strength of our life: and whenever doubts flash across us of God's power to help us; whenever our own will is in hard and painful conflict with His will, let us think of the Son of Man in the shadows of Gethsemane, Who, within sight of His predestined cross, rested the prayer that it might even then pass away on the majestic truth, that with God all things are possible. He nevertheless submitted His own will to the Father's, and, in the deepest sense of the words, was heard in that He prayed. In the garden He said,

Luke xxii. 42. *Nevertheless, not my will, but thine, be done;* and when His enemies seized Him, and Simon Peter tried to rescue Him, He

John xviii. 11. answered, *The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?*

ONLY two points remain, one of which contains a caution that may prevent disappointment, the other a truth that will suggest comfort.

No infallible signs of Divine Providence.

Are there any signs, one will ask, by which we may infallibly discover the leading of Divine Providence, and which will save us, not only from perplexity and anxiety at the time, but also from actual mistake? The answer is, there have been such signs in the infancy of the Church of God; there are none now. When Israel came out of Egypt, a pillar of cloud went before them by day, and a pillar of fire was over their head by night. The Shechinah, with its mysterious gleam, flashed on high priests under the early monarchy, the revelation of the Divine Purposes. Under the Judges, seers or prophets had the power of giving information through supernatural means; and it was on an errand of this kind that Samuel first met Saul. But even in the time of the Herods these signs had passed away. The Lord steadily refused to give

signs of his Messiahship other than His own miracles: and the reason He assigned for His refusal — *The kingdom of God cometh not with observation, The kingdom of God is within you*—applies with equal force to the evident fact, that the way of God's Providence cannot be known by outward marks or evidences; if it tarry, we must wait for it, though sooner or later it will be made manifest to the obedient and child-like heart.

Luke xvii. 20, 21.

At some times, and under some circumstances, indeed, God's will seems to flash upon us; and we have nothing to do but follow it. But our difficulty is not at all, where God works independently of us; it is where He works with us, and we with Him; where events are apparently as much our own bringing about as His, and where, in the use of means, at the best imperfect and unreliable, we seem to take all pains sometimes only to go wrong. What rules are there, in such a case, beyond diligence, and patience, and obedience, and prayer? Surely none. Diligence in consulting friends (though indeed we cannot possibly

do all they bid us when they would have us do twenty different things), and in procuring information, and in weighing our case on all sides. Patience, for half our mistakes in life come from being in a hurry, and we are just as likely to go wrong if we rush on in advance of God's Providence, as if we lag idly behind it. Obedience, for to be willing to do God's will is the real crux of the matter: too often we consult Him, going with the multitude of our idols, and then we are taken captive in the toils of our own heart; and we deliberately pray ourselves into our mistake. Then prayer, honest, humble, simple, persevering prayer: and we can do no more. But God knoweth this as well as we do; and He who hath promised wisdom to them that ask it, until the time comes will give peace; when the time comes will give direction. Anything is more possible than that God should not guide the meek in judgment. Nothing is more sure than that when we have done our best, He will acknowledge and bless it. His promise is, *I will guide thee with mine* Ps. xxxi. 8.

eye." The mere glance of the eye or the expression of a feature in the face of one we love and understand is quite sufficient to indicate his wish and to express his mind. So will it ever be between God and His people. If Divine Providence guides all who wish to be guided; yet it must not be held responsible for the mistakes of those who love their own way.

It may often indeed happen, that when after much perplexity we have taken the course, and entered the path that seemed best at the time, not only do we presently fail to perceive how it is the best, and why God should have directed us into it; but disasters and disappointments encountering us in it, compel us to doubt if we have been guided at all. In such a case let us remember one thing, and do another. What we are to remember is, that *we walk by faith, not by sight.* God has never promised to make His dealings with us plain and clear at the moment. It may take months and years before His plan all unfolds itself, and we see how the path, that seemed so crooked

2 Cor. v. 7.

and thorny, was at once the best and the shortest. The thing to do is, not to hasten to leave it in search of a better one, but patiently and manfully to go on where we are, trusting that God's wisdom will justify itself at last, and that His love will bless to us our present perplexity. Paul went to Rome round by the prison at Cæsarea. Moses first went into Midian before he returned to Egypt. We cannot see the end from the beginning; but God can. *What I do, thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter.* John xiii. 7.

"Weary deserts we may tread,
A dreary labyrinth may thread,
Through dark ways underground be led;

"Yet if we will our guide obey,
The dreariest path, the darkest way,
Shall issue out in heavenly day." *

Divine Providence for all men.

ONCE more, for those who do not recognise the existence of Divine Providence, whether they are heathens or Christians, strangers to us, or friends and kinsfolk,—is there a Providence for them, though they shut their eyes to it? Is there a purpose of Divine love counselling and desiring their

* Trench.

good, though they steadily resist it, and will not suffer it to bless them? Nay, for those of us who are conscious of wishing to follow it and yield to it in our best moments, when we disobey it and go wrong, what will be the result to us? and will the sins, and failures, and mistakes, and infirmities of past years never be recovered, never be repaired.

Divine Providence is for all men, and rules all men, and provides for all men, and blesses all men in proportion as they are willing to be blessed. If His love is perfected in us, then indeed we are safe and happy; if it is only on His side toward us, and not on ours towards Him, then, though His sun equally shines, His rain equally descends on us; in the higher purpose of His mercy He waits to be gracious; standing at the door of our heart and knocking, He remains outside till we let Him in. There are many ways, were they needed, of proving this Providence of universal love. We who love Him now can perhaps recall the time when we did not love Him, did not think of Him, did not even wish to please Him. Yet did

He not watch over us then, biding His opportunity? Did our coldness quench the flame of His love, did our turning away make Him less mighty to save? *We love Him, be-* 1 John iv. 19.
cause He first loved us. Here is the account that every soul conscious of its acceptance gives to itself of its salvation. But what has been true of us is true of others, or what a delusion missions must be! God gave His Son to redeem the world, because He loved the world; and those whom He loves He would save. Therefore, let us, thankfully, unhesitatingly, devoutly, recognise a Divine Providence watching over and waiting for all men, if by all means He may save some; and let this be the ground of our confidence, the strength of our hope, the backbone of our prayers, about those dear to us, who are as yet without God in the world.

"I say to thee, do thou repeat
To the first man thou mayest meet,
In lane, highway, or open street:

"That he, and we, and all men move
Under a canopy of love,
As broad as the blue sky above."*

* Trench.

As for ourselves, and all our past mistakes,
Phil. iii. 13. and follies, and blunders, and disasters, *forgetting those things which are behind*, we will *reach forth unto those things which are before.* Let us beware of fretful, feeble anxiousness, which unnerves us for duty. Let us have a bright, manly, cheerful trust in God. Perhaps we cannot always be quite right, but an honest purpose will save us from serious mistakes; and as we have observed just before, it is in human nature, when we have once decided and the result of our decision is yet in the distance, to wish we had decided differently. Be this as it may, God in the end can turn even our failures and mistakes to His glory and our own blessing; His wisdom can overrule our error, and His mercy will forgive our weakness. If, through our own fault, not His, our pastures have not been as green, our waters not as still as they might have been, we may thank Him if He has made the way of our own will hard and humbling for us. To be taught to trust God, through suffering the consequences of mis-

trust, is a lesson worth learning, though at the price of much sorrow.

Nevertheless, whatever our waywardness and wilfulness, as we look back and count up our past blessings, they may well fill our heart with thankfulness. Dark as the day may have been, *at evening time it shall be light.* Zech. xiv. 7. Sometimes our path in life seems like a lane full of windings, where the steep banks shut out the light and air, and all we can do is to trudge steadily on through the thick mire. But if we look high up in front of us we shall see, as Israel saw, the faint blue hills of the Land of Promise rising up against the sky. The path will come out at length in full view of the Celestial City; and at last we shall be at home.

III.

CHASTISEMENT.

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CHASTISEMENT.

"HE RESTORETH MY SOUL: HE LEADETH ME IN THE PATHS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS FOR HIS NAME'S SAKE."

> "*Prosperity is the blessing of the Old Testament, adversity is the blessing of the New, which carrieth the greater benediction, and the clearer revelation of God's favour.*"
>
> —LORD BACON.

IF it is possible in the Twenty-third Psalm to trace the outlines of David's history, it is equally possible in the third verse to guess the workings of his mind. He had been exulting in his assurance of the Good Shepherd's love. His lips were yet trembling with that exquisite chant of praise for pastures green and waters still, when suddenly,

it may be, the thought flashed across him—"Has it been always so?" and while memory recalled the interruption of mercy, conscience betrayed the cause. "Were the pastures green and the waters still when Bathsheba's child died; or when Absalom drove me from my home and my kingdom, and I went up Olivet barefoot, weeping as I went up? when confusion covered my face, and reproach broke my heart, and all God's waves and billows went over me? No: yet it was through my own sin, not through the unfaithfulness of God. I had gone astray like a lost sheep, to slake my thirst with draughts of guilty pleasure in the way of my own heart; and the rough road by which He brought me back was His way of bringing me out of my sin. It was to restore my soul, and to lead me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake."

The meaning of Chastisement.

Nothing so much tests our knowledge of God, or our actual standing-place in His kingdom, as the way in which we interpret chastisement. Those, who are altogether without God in the world, are disposed to

look on it as an unkind and unaccountable interference with their happiness; an evidence, indeed, of Divine power, but not of Divine goodness. They do not hear in it a kind voice saying to them, *Return unto the* Hosea xiv. 1. *Lord thy God.* They do not bow humbly to the rod, which deals its stripes in this life, in the hope that thereby they may be spared in the next. There is suffering, but no healing process afterwards; a sense of uneasiness, but no real sorrow for sin. Who can wonder then that affliction hardens instead of softening them; that, instead of coming out into the light of the reconciled face of God, in the spirit of a penitent child, they go back, like Pharaoh, into their Egyptian darkness with hearts of stone!

David, however, in a very different spirit accepts that chastisement of which, with all his prosperity, he had as large a share as most men. He connects it with the Providence of God, he beholds it in the purpose of God, he accepts it as the mercy of God, he recognises in it the character of God. And this, his explanation of it, teaches us

that for Christians there are two aspects in which it may be profitably considered: the one, what God means in it with respect to us; the other, what He means in it with respect to Himself. With respect to us He means restoration and holiness. Restoration in the case of our having gone back: *He restoreth my soul.* Holiness, as the unvarying and ultimate end of all His dealings with us, whom He has from the beginning chosen *to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth. He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.*

2 Thess. ii. 13.

Ps. xxiii. 3.

Chastisement is for Restoration.

The office of a shepherd is not only to guide and protect and provide for the sheep, but also to go after them when they have strayed away. Our Lord, in the first of the three parables in the fifteenth chapter of St Luke, appeals to this as to a universally recognised habit among men. *What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?* But Ezekiel assigns this

Luke xv. 4.

office to Messiah: *For thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out. As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day.* Ezek. xxxiv. 11, 12.

Restoration implies wandering or backsliding, and is applicable either to a case of lapse, where there has been a real, though not necessarily a visible, falling away from God; or to a besetting sin, which is seriously affecting the spiritual state, and, like a rank and noxious weed, must instantly and at any cost be cut down to the roots. Of actual falls from God, open or secret, David himself is a memorable instance. When the man after God's own heart went astray, God indeed restored him, but it was with pangs and convulsions, as when a man all but drowned struggles back from suspended animation into life. The greater the height he had reached, the deeper his fall from it; the more marked his holiness, the more scandalous his

sin. If ever man suffered in this life the temporal consequences of guilt, it was David.

Yet there are other kinds of falling away than his. Many, whose hearts are as much estranged from God as the psalmist's, are never surprised into an outburst of crime, simply because they are too cold or too cautious to commit themselves publicly. Nay, their secret sins may be of quite another kind; sins, it may be, for which they may even gain credit; *men will praise thee, when thou doest well unto thyself:* yet sins far more abhorred by Him who can weigh motives and pity weakness; and known only to Him to whom all hearts are open, and from whom no secrets are hid.

Psalm xlix. 18.

We have an instance of this kind in the Church of Sardis. *I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.* Stronger language than this could hardly be used of any within Christ's kingdom. Yet it describes the actual condition of thousands upon thousands, who have lost their first love, and are fallen back from their early aspirations; who pray and yet restrain

Rev. iii. 1.

prayer; who open their Bible, and sit with it before them now and then, but in no sense really use it as their spiritual food; who give away, but never really deny themselves of anything for Christ's sake; and in whom a steadily lessening zeal for God, and a woefully diminished anxiety for the welfare of others, indicate but too surely the ebb of their inner life.

Human judgment, indeed, must not presume to penetrate either into the recesses of a fellow-sinner's conscience, or into the possible meaning of the righteous chastisements of God. We ought to judge ourselves; we ought not to judge our brethren. Yet, perhaps, these are cases which more than any require the knife and the cautery of severe affliction; and when such a soul, writhing in its misery, bitterly complains that its punishment is more than it can bear, the not yet drugged conscience may listen to the question—Is there not a cause? For when sin comes to a head, and discharges itself from the system in a complete, though in a virulent outbreak, the scandal to the Church

may be greater, but the peril to the sinner is less. Fever is often preferable to paralysis. The loss of a limb may be a less severe shock in the end than the gradual corruption of the blood, or the steady enfeebling of the vital powers. When a soul is asleep, yet dreams that it is awake; when the discharge of religious duties, the use of religious privileges, the companionship of religious people, and the uttering of religious phrases condone to the self-complacent soul for chilled love to men and suspended intercourse with God, it is not a soft and gentle voice that will whisper it out of its death sleep: maybe only a life-long sorrow will bring it back to the Shepherd's arms.

Special instances of Chastisement in Scripture.

But over and above the instances of a public fall or a secret decay, there is the yet more frequent instance of special acts of sin visited with special acts of punishment; the act indicating the habit; the punishment not only suited to the sin, but in proportion to it; the purpose of God being, not to cast off and destroy, but to admonish and restore. Rebekah, Jacob,

Moses, Josiah, Elijah, are each of them instances of special sins and imperfections meeting with special chastisement; *and these are written for our admonition, on whom the ends of the world are come.* 1 Cor. x. 11.

Rebekah's sin was that of favouritism. *Rebekah.* Through her scheming partiality Jacob was successfully urged to supplant Esau; but her heart's desire, when it came, was as an apple of Sodom. Both mother and son were punished; but the mother's penalty is the more significant. Thinking to send her son away for a few days till Esau's anger was abated, unwittingly she dismissed him for ever; and she herself found the worm that was to gnaw at the root of her gourd.

Jacob's characteristic sin was deceit, the *Jacob.* flaw that runs through his whole life, and robs his character of strength and dignity. But as he sinned in deceit, so was he punished by it; as he conspired to deceive his own parent, his sons conspired to deceive him. The heartless falsehood of Joseph's pretended death, which withered the patriarch's very soul, must also have

smitten him with a bitter remorse for the fraud he had practised on his blind father. His sin found him out, and pursued him, and would not leave him, till he laid himself down in his grave.

But if we pass from sins to faults—that is, from what is perverse and deliberate, to what is simply infirm and imperfect—we shall see how, in the case even of the most eminent of God's servants, impatience and self-will and unbelief cause us to wander from the path of duty, and compel for us the firm, though tender, admonition of God.

Moses. Moses thought to serve God when he went to visit his Hebrew kinsmen, and when he desired, though at his own risk, to assert their cause. But, so far as we can see, he was not thereby justified in taking the law into his own hands, and slaying that Egyptian. It was hardly trusting God, who knew His people's sorrows as well as he did, nor was it really aiding his friends. Anyhow, the result of it was that, unable to vindicate himself, he had to flee; and though in the Epistle to the Hebrews we read God's own approval of his

final choice between the reproach of Christ and the treasures in Egypt, there is not a word to defend that hasty homicide. For all that we know to the contrary, he paid as his penalty an exile of forty years in the wilderness; and though we can well understand how that time was blessed to him and used by him, yet but for that characteristic impatience Israel might possibly not have had to wait so long for their freedom; he at least might have passed more happily that third of his noble life.

Josiah.

Josiah is a signal instance of the fatal errors into which self-will may sometimes lead a good man, and also of the severity with which God must visit it. The Chronicles, which give a fuller account than the Kings, make it sufficiently clear, not only that King Necho had no personal design against Judah at that time, but that he conceived himself to be actually carrying out the designs of Divine Providence, and did his utmost to dissuade Josiah from hindering them. Josiah, however, for reasons which it is unnecessary to examine, obstinately persisted in his purpose. Bent on his own way, he had it, but

2 Chron. xxxv. 20–24.

it cost him his life and his crown; and that disastrous end to such a promising beginning is a terrible proof that we may and must go wrong, if we are resolved on it, in spite of all warning to the contrary; and that God will not interfere to preserve His own saints from the consequences of headstrong folly.

Elijah. Elijah, strange as it may sound, is an instance of despondency and unbelief, which God could not altogether pass over. After the slaughter of the priests on Carmel, we should have thought him capable of any daring; and had that great blow at idolatry been instantly followed up by decided action, the worship of Jehovah might have been restored in Samaria. But when the message came from Jezebel, a great panic smote the prophet with sudden helplessness, and he who had defied a whole priesthood, with a king at their head, fled away in fear at the threat of a vindictive woman; and going a day's journey into the wilderness, that no one might trace him in his flight, at length asked to die. Bent on even a longer flight, he was graciously strengthened by God for so great

fatigue; yet we need not interpret that as a certain proof that God's Providence in the first instance pointed him to Horeb. It merely implies that, since he was resolved on going, God would enable him to reach his journey's end, that there He might meet him and ask him about his fear. But surely had he trusted in God that He would deliver him and yet further use him, he would never have fled there at all. In one point of view it was so much lost time, if not also the throwing away of an opportunity, which was never repeated. The question asked of him is significant enough of God's interpretation of his conduct. Though his chastisement was confined to reproof, even to be reproved was a fall for a saint like him. *What doest thou here, Elijah?* this was his Lord's expostulation with him for his sudden giving way to that utter despondency. He was at once sent back across the whole extent of the land, and on an errand of as great peril as that from which he had so lately escaped. 1 Kings xix. 9.

Let us then remember, that even our faults grieve the good Spirit of God; and

our infirmities and imperfections, if not watched against by us, must be chastened by Him. Though God is not extreme to mark what is done amiss, faults may grow into sins, sins may harden into habits. *Not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish*; this is the description of the glorious Church which, in the day of His return, shall be worthy to be the Lamb's wife; here, too, is the key to the discipline, the secret of the purpose, which is in Christ's heart about us now.

Eph. v. 27.

Probably, moreover, if we had the same opportunity for analysis and induction in the moral government of God that we possess in His natural government, we might come to see that every moral act inevitably brings about sooner or later its own result, as any other effect follows any other cause in the other departments of His providential kingdom; that, in this respect, we are still under a system of present rewards and punishments, the form somewhat changed, but not the essence; the principle

being everlasting, though the manner of its manifestation transitory. Thus, in this court of law there is no appeal, and for these offences (in the sense of a present chastisement) no atonement. Of this I am profoundly sure that Christian people need to be very faithfully warned, and very carefully instructed on the close, and unfailing, and continual connexion between sin and sorrow.* For Christ died, not to save us from the inevitable consequences of our actions here, (which would simply be impunity in sin,) but from the deserved penalty of our actions hereafter. To spare us the needful pain of chastisement would be to deprive us of the only medicine which can remove the cause, as well as heal the sorrow. It would not only frustrate the purpose of Christ's death, *who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people zealous of good works,* Titus ii. 14

* Let any one who thinks this language too strong, read carefully the chapters entitled: "Dieu glorifié dans la souffrance"—"Jesus Christ notre example dans la souffrance"—"Le péché"—"L'homme de douleur, et les hommes de douleur," in *Les adieux d'Adolphe Monod.*

it would also contradict the prophet's explanation of chastisement, given through the Spirit of God. *Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins? Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord. Let us lift up our heart with our hands unto God in the heavens.*

Lam. iii. 39–41.

Chastisement is for Sanctification.

BUT chastisement is sent not only to recall the backslider, or to set the mark of God's displeasure on some act or habit of sin; it is to sanctify us, to add to our positive and personal holiness, to edify us higher into the image of Christ. *Every branch in me that beareth not fruit He taketh away; and every branch that beareth fruit, He purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.*

John xv. 2.

Meaning of Sanctification.

And here let it be explained what sanctification really means; what is possible and what impossible in the way of growth in grace, and in putting on the Lord Jesus Christ. It is not mending the old nature, which we inherit from Adam; it is cultivating and developing the new nature which we receive from Christ. The old nature

cannot be improved; it is under a ban and a curse; it is to be crucified with its affections and lusts, and mortified in its members; we are to put it off, as we put off a worn-out and defiled garment; nay, we are to count ourselves dead to it, as if it had no more relation to us, since we are alive to God through Jesus Christ our Lord. The soul is like a house of which strangers have taken possession, and lord it cruelly over the owner. What shall you do for your liberty? Can you change these strangers' hearts and make them other men, so that you would be content or even glad they should remain? That is impossible. Pride will never be humble, lust will never be pure, selfishness will never think of a neighbour's interests, envy will never exult in a neighbour's joy. "Old inbred habits will make resistance; but by better habits they shall be entirely overcome." * The only thing to be done is to turn them out by bringing in others stronger than they, who will, little by little, get the mastery over them. Thus the way to con-

* Thomas à Kempis.

quer pride is to cultivate humility; if we would be gentle, let us practise self-control; if we would think of others and help them, we must day by day try to bear their burdens. The old affections must be expelled by new; the invading tyrants must be besieged and cast out by the legitimate owners; and though we shall carry with us to our grave the roots of our old nature, though not till we have cast off the garment of our corruptible flesh shall we have our full liberty as the sons of God, it is of infinite moment for us to ascertain that the only way of holiness is to overcome evil with good; and that practically there is no limit to the power of the grace of God, save that which is imposed by ourselves.

In the light of these remarks the necessity and the purpose of chastisement will be seen more clearly. *Blessed is the man whom thou chasteneth, O Lord, and teacheth him out of thy law.* Chastisement instructs us, softens us, educates us, elevates us.

Psalm xciv. 12.

There are many lessons it teaches us of God, and the world, and ourselves; but the one

thing we have first to learn, and the lesson it imparts to us more distinctly, more continually than any other, is the nature, and the depth, and the complicatedness, and the deceitfulness of sin. Thereby we see how sin, like a foreign poison in the blood, affects and corrupts our entire nature, tainting innocent affections, perverting harmless dispositions, and, like the roots of a noxious weed, spreading itself secretly over the whole surface of our being. Affliction detects our secret, and perhaps unsuspected faults, much in the same way that acid acts on litmus paper. It also decomposes our complex character into all its multitudinous and varied elements, laying bare, to our surprise and sorrow, deformities of which we never dreamed. We discover (and any child of God can testify to the bitterness of such discovery) what unbelief lurks in us, what unthankfulness, what desperate selfishness, what numbness of heart both towards God and man, what petulance and waywardness, what obstinacy and self-will, what real shrinking from close intercourse with God. Then if we, tainted and

cheated by sin as we all are, come in any degree to hate and fear it, it is only a step farther to regard it as God regards it: and to see how it is not His hatred of us, nor His desire to destroy us, but His hatred of sin, and His purpose to save us from it, that brings down His rod.

There are three distinct proofs of God's abhorrence of sin: Christ's cross, the whole creation groaning and travailing together in pain, and hell. Pain, whether of body or mind, is certainly sometimes the visible mark of God's displeasure at sin; and, as conscience is the witness of God within us, sorrow MAY BE the witness of God without us, that He hates it with a perfect hatred, and would have us hate it too. The fifty-first psalm brings this out in a remarkable light. If ever one man in this world was cruelly wronged by another, Uriah was wronged by David. Yet his sin against man, in that hour of his overwhelming remorse, seemed nothing when compared with his sin against God. *Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight: that Thou*

Psalm li. 4.

mightest be justified when Thou speakest, and be clear when Thou judgest. Let us all see that there can be no real beginning in holiness, much less no true growth in it, no adequate and absorbing appreciation of Christ's atoning sacrifice, no crying out for pardon through His precious blood, and no living gladness in it when it is found: no honest wrestling with wickedness in our own hearts, and no determined battling with it in the world around us, without deep and abiding convictions, through the teaching of His Spirit, of its utter abominableness before God.

Chastisement is for Discipline.

But there is another result purposed for us in chastisement, which affects not merely the apprehension of truth, but the moulding of character; which, besides enlarging our knowledge, fertilises our heart. Sorrow, as a discipline for the soul, subdues the will, softens the temper, curbs the passions, pulverises, so to speak, the rough excrescences of character, which, like lumps of hard clay on the surface of a tilled field, turn the edge of the plough, and baulk the skill of the sower. It is not that we are to lose our

will; that would be to lose our individuality; but that retaining it, and subduing it, we may offer it up daily as a living sacrifice to God. *I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus; Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: turn Thou me, and I shall be turned; for Thou art the Lord my God. Surely after that I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh.* There are thousands upon thousands much chastened because much loved; because much loved, taken such pains with, that they might grow like God. In a little while, instead of murmuring at it, we shall exult over it in a hymn of praise which angels might envy. Till then, let us glory in tribulation also, for *tribulation worketh patience.*

Jer. xxxi. 18, 19.

Rom. v. 3.

Chastisement is an education.

Another end of chastisement is to educate and prepare us for life. He who knows what is coming on us would help us to meet it. Not only does He offer us blessing, but, what is much more, He would make us capable of receiving it, and enjoying it, and

retaining it, though by a process of trial which, at the moment of its coming, may make us stagger through unbelief. So, where life is to be busy, or prosperous, or brilliant, or much encumbered with temptation, affliction acts through the memory, like ballast on a vessel, to keep us steady, and sober, and humble; and not unfrequently do we observe in the lives of Christian men an interval, longer or shorter as it may be, of inactivity, or sickness, or sorrow of a marked kind divinely interposed between the two halves of their life.

Joseph is an instance of this. For him the prison may have been the only safe approach to the throne. No one can govern who has not first learned to obey. He had to learn within the prison walls lessons of human nature, his own as well as other men's, which he could not have learned before, which it would have been too late for him to have learned afterwards. He was also to be instructed how to suffer patiently, how to be silent under calumny, how to requite with justice, how to recompense with mercy.

Chastisement is a preparation for Heaven.

BUT there is one other result which chastisement aims at producing in us—greater nearness to God, and so greater meetness for heaven. As it is impossible to overstate the desire of God's heart, that we would receive His love, and walk in fellowship with Him, and consult Him in our difficulties, and worship Him with our entire souls; so is it needful to confess, humbling and saddening as the confession must be, that few of us do this willingly, or heartily, or entirely, though, so far as we go, it may be deliberately and sincerely: we too often give self and the world as much as we can, Him as little. For, though we can trust God for our salvation, we distrust Him for our happiness. We look to Him to bless us in the world to come, we look elsewhere to be blessed in the present world. Health, money, friends, advancement, society, knowledge, business—these are the gods that we worship, on these we rely; and we do not discover that they are but broken cisterns which hold no water,

until God shatters them at a blow, and so we fall back on Him as our only abiding portion, in whom alone are the fresh springs of our life. Let us humbly confess that God desires us and we do not desire Him; He is ever turning towards us to bless us, and we—we are ever turning away. His hands are filled with gifts for which we hardly care. His heart is overflowing with love, which does not content or gladden us, unless it flows in the channels we ourselves choose for it. Idolatry is still the characteristic sin of men: love of this present evil world has far more power over the best of us than we think it has; and with many of us, it is only when health is impaired or money is lost, or friends die, or occupation is suspended, that our eyes are fully opened to discern good from evil, and we made willing to say, *I will arise, and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against Heaven, and before thee.* Luke xv. 18

And thus,—for no one can be spiritually minded without being heavenly minded as well,—as earth attracts us less, heaven attracts us more; we confess that we are

strangers and pilgrims, we seek a city yet to come. For life with all its burdens and anxieties is still such a blessed thing, this earth with its ties, and pursuits, and objects, and possessions has so much in it to occupy, and fascinate, and gladden; friends are so kind, home is so happy, knowledge is so noble, nature is so fair, that, say as we will, think as we may, that heaven is our home, and this world a wilderness, were our health unbroken, and our tasks unfinished, and our energies fresh, and our homes full, we should follow with very reluctant steps, and moistened eyes, and a heart looking behind us, the messenger that takes us away. We are meant to love life; nay, we are made to love it. Love of life is no sin, it is merely a lower kind of love than a desire for the fruition of life eternal in the presence of the Lamb; and the Divine way of lifting us up from the lower level to the higher, without contradicting, on the one hand, God's purposes for our earthly service, or, on the other hand, crushing the beautiful human affections, which are the features of

God's own image in ruined yet not quite defaced souls, is by gradually weaning us from earthly things, rather than by violently alienating us from them; by correcting and elevating, rather than by destroying our natural instincts and capacities, through the blessed prospect of the *inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away.* 1 Peter i. 4.

Nature of heavenly mindedness.

For what is true heavenly-mindedness? Surely not a cowardly, feeble, sickly craving to get rid of life because it is full of risks and toil and change. If we wish for heaven only because we are tired of earth, we shall soon want to leave it and be back here. Heavenly-mindedness, such as God would work in us, is a weariness of sin, not of duty; a desire to see God, not merely to leave men. To be with Him for whom we have been waiting; to behold Him in whom we have been believing; and to adore Him whom we have tried and wished to love, yet never with the same devoted love which we gave to husband, or wife, or child, or friend; this is the desire for heaven which God would ripen in us by His dispensations

of sorrow, a desire which is perfectly compatible with the manful and entire and cheerful and patient discharge of all our duties here.

"When a soul has seen,
By the means of evil, that good is best,
And through earth and its noise, what is heaven's serene,
When its faith in the same has stood the test;—
Why, the child grown man, you burn the rod,
The uses of labour are clearly done;
There remaineth a rest for the people of God,
And I have had troubles enough for one." *

Such, then, are at least some of the purposes which God would accomplish towards His people in chastening them. But the verse also teaches us that He has purposes with respect to Himself: FOR HIS NAME'S SAKE. He is *holy*, and therefore He chastens us, that no one may accuse Him of countenancing sin. For His sake as well as ours, and for the world as well as for the Church, He must show Himself to be a holy God, loving righteousness, and hating iniquity.

* Robert Browning.

THERE have been three distinct periods marking His providential government of the Church in its features of blessing and chastisement. The first was under the theocracy, when the plagues on Egypt and the destruction of the wicked Canaanites marked the period when Jehovah himself was Lord and King of His people, and made the rod of His power to be known.* The second dates from the Kings to the Incarnation, when God was gradually withdrawing Himself from visible and supernatural interference, and teaching His people to walk by faith and not by sight. And this being a time when men, whose forefathers had seen the very footsteps and hand-prints of God, began to doubt—since these had disappeared—if there was a God at all, the Psalms abound in petitions, not so much for a personal vengeance on personal enemies, as for a public and righteous retribution on the enemies of God. "Let God show Himself to be a living and holy God by punish-

Chastisement is to vindicate God's holiness.

*I am indebted for the above thought to a sermon of the Rev. James Moorhouse.

ing the wicked and rewarding the good;" this is the one thought that runs through those scriptures, the tone and spirit of which, when not precisely understood, shock and perplex some of us now. Such, for instance, is the meaning of the prayer,

Psalm xciv. 2, (Prayer-Book Version.) *Arise, Thou Judge of the earth, and reward the proud after their deserving.* Such the

Psalm xciv. 3. gist of the complaint, *How long shall the wicked, how long shall the wicked triumph.*

Mal. ii. 17. Such the essence of the question, *Where is the God of judgment?* Such the substance

Psalm xxxvii. 1. of the exhortation, *Fret not thyself because of evil-doers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity.* Such the spirit of the

Psalm lviii. 10, 11. thanksgiving, *The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance; he shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked, so that a man shall say, Verily there is a reward for the righteous, verily He is a God that judgeth the earth.* The third period is the present, in which we look for a judgment to come, and are persuaded that whatever may seem to be imperfect or unjust now, will be explained and vindicated, and set right by the Son of man on

the throne of His glory. We do not therefore expect always to see sin visibly punished, and we are expressly forbidden by our Lord himself to pass hasty or severe judgments on others. Yet this does not repeal God's law of personal chastisement, nor does it forbid our asking Him, when His rod visits us, "Lord, wherefore is it come?" A holy God hates sin, and He can have no truce with it, no forbearance towards it, no halting of purpose, no slackness of hand. If God did not visit sin at all, men would instantly say, He cares not for it. But when we see that He hates it all, hates it always, hates it everywhere, then His name is consistent with His government, and His character with His acts; and if we really desire for ourselves to be holy as He is holy, though we shall smart under His rod, we shall not wonder at it, nor resist it, for He will be seen to be doing the very thing for us that we have asked Him to do, and that we cannot do for ourselves.

But He is also *righteous*. This is their song who stand on the sea of glass, having the harps

of God, and sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb: *Great and marvellous are Thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of saints.* Sometimes, no doubt, we are tempted to think that this is not so. When the punishment seems out of proportion to the offence, or when it is *sorrow upon sorrow;* or when it goes on year by year; or when it is final, in the sense that there is no hope of ever escaping from it, we hardly know how to reconcile it with our ideas of God's justice; the punishment is greater than we can bear, if it is heavier than we have deserved.

Rev. xv. 3.

Phil. ii. 27.

How severe, for instance, was the doom on Moses that shut him out of the Land of Promise, and which included him in the same sentence with those, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness, because they thought scorn of that pleasant land, and gave no credence to God's word! Is there a more touching prayer in all the Old Testament than that of this great prophet? *O Lord God, Thou hast begun to show Thy servant Thy greatness, and Thy mighty hand—I pray thee, let me go over, and*

Deut. iii. 24-26.

see the good land that is beyond Jordan, that goodly mountain, and Lebanon. But the Lord was wroth with me for your sakes, and would not hear me: and the Lord said unto me, Let it suffice thee; speak no more unto me of this matter.

To glance at one more instance: the faithful but disobedient prophet paid a very terrible penalty for being the victim of a wicked fraud. The same kind of thing, though in a different form, continually happens now. Imprudence or impatience are sometimes as severely visited as perverseness or malice. A mistake in youth creeps after us through life with the gloomy shadow of a crime. Cæsar crossed but one Rubicon: but for us there often are countless Rubicons in daily life of rash words, hasty impulses, unwise plans, which are but the work of a moment, yet cut our lives in two, and make a wide gulf between a happy past and a clouded future. The loss of a limb is irremediable. The death of a friend is irremediable. We cannot live our life over again: regret may prevent future mistakes; it cannot repair the past.

Well, the one thing to do is to fall back on the righteousness of God, and to say to ourselves, *Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him.* We cannot be fair judges of the equity of punishment without knowing accurately the nature and extent of the sin. It was a severe punishment on Moses; but be it said with all dutiful and loyal respect to that grandest of men, it was for a great offence; and had God passed it over, it never could have been said of Him, *He will by no means clear the guilty.* As to the disobedient prophet, he was deceived, no doubt; but that was his fault, not his excuse. To be deceived by others may sometimes mean to deceive ourselves: and though the punishment was final in this world—though the true prophet suffered and the false prophet escaped,—in the next world we may venture to believe they will change places; and the verdict pronounced by the instinct of human justice will be ratified by the sentence of God.

Psalm ciii. 13.

Exod. xxxiv. 7.

Let us steadfastly believe that God is never hard; never afflicts *willingly*, or grieves the

Lam. iii. 33.

children of men; never deals with us *after* Psalm ciii. 10. *our sins*, or rewards us *according to our iniquities*. Does not our own experience tell us this? Heavy as may be our trials, do not we secretly feel we want them all, and that less would not do? Our sorrow is not to atone for sin, only to help to deliver us from its power: yet it must be sufficient to effect this; and therefore, to touch the edge of the wound instead of probing it, would be but to trifle with our disease, and prolong our pain.

For, once more, *God is faithful, who will* 1 Cor. x. 13. *not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.* When there is *sorrow upon sorrow*, there is Phil. ii. 27. *strength to strength;* and those who know Psalm lxxxiv. 7. most about affliction, will be the readiest to confess what lessons it has taught them of the tenderness and faithfulness of God. He knows exactly how far it is safe to go with us: and He watches over us in the furnace, waiting for the moment when He may bring us out. Our powers are never really overtasked, for *they that wait on the Lord shall* Isaiah xl. 31.

renew their strength. Our patience need never be exhausted, if we remember in whose hand our times are. Our resources are never dried up, for the fulness of God is at our disposal. Our faith cannot fail while we look up to Christ. *My grace is sufficient for thee:* this is a promise for us, as well as for the apostle. And if we ask, as many ask with Job every day, *What is my strength, that I should hope? and what is mine end, that I should prolong my life?* let us lay hold of the blessed assurance, not only to Israel after the flesh, but to Israel after the spirit: *I will not contend for ever, neither will I be always wroth: lest the spirit should fail before me, and the souls which I have made.*

2 Cor. xii. 9.

Job vi. 11.

Isa. lvii. 16.

Chastisement individual.

IN conclusion, to repeat a thought, which has already been dwelt upon in former chapters: the individuality of Divine chastisements, or the fitness of each man's sorrow for his own condition, is strikingly indicated in the words, *He restoreth* ME, *He leadeth* ME. Life would be intolerable, could we not trace in it the plan of a Divine providence watch-

ing over us and guiding us; sorrow would be overwhelming, had we to look on it as a chance arrow shot against us at a venture, and not aimed by the hand of one whom we can trust and love. When God sends chastisement, He knows to whom He sends it, and why He sends it, and what He sends. His treatment of us is infinitely wise in its precise adaptation to the circumstances under which it is applied, to the result which it is intended to accomplish, and to the character which it is sent to sanctify. Some kinds of affliction, those, for instance, that are tedious and lasting, are in the nature of a systematic discipline and improvement, permanently to strengthen faith and hope and love in us. Others, such as sharp and sudden trials, are tests sent to try what is in our heart, whether we serve God for Himself, or only for His gifts. If anything, so to speak, is providential, affliction is. If in anything whatever we are bound to trust God with all the completeness of our judgment, with all the strength of our understanding, with all the adoration of our heart,

it is when He is taking us apart to make us perfect through suffering. Therefore it is that God sends sorrow to one man, and not to another; at one time in this way, at another time in that. The sorrow that might cure us to-day might not cure us to-morrow; the sorrow that might be good for me, might not be good for you. Each man has his own sorrows, different from any one else's in all the world, since he himself is different from any one else. Each individual believer is led his own way into the wilderness; each has Jesus with him there.

How to keep the blessing of Chastisement.

But what is the key to that secret, which we all find so hard, keeping the blessing of the sorrow, when the sorrow itself is passed? In one sense it is impossible that the freshness of our first impressions should never fade, or that in the heat and burden of the day the flower should be as bright and as fragrant, as when it dropped with dew in the first blush of morning. But it is not the feeling of the blessing, that is so important, as the blessing itself; not the echo of the

Saviour's voice, but the Saviour himself that we should really desire to retain. And our Lord will not leave us, unless we bid Him. The believer's heart is far more precious to Him than the material glories of a visible paradise with its walls of jasper and its gates of pearl. Let us be sure that we shall retain Him in proportion as we cling to Him, and lay hold of the hem of His garment, and say, *Abide with us;* humbly Luke xxiv. 29
reminding Him of all His goodness and pity when His hand was heavy on us, and the dews of suffering moistened our brow, and we had not strength for words; only the soul turned towards Him as flowers to the sun. Ours be the psalmist's prayer: *O when* Psalm ci. 2.
wilt Thou come unto me? I will walk within my house with a perfect heart. Ours be the prophet's complaint: *O the hope of Israel, the* Jer. xiv. 8.
Saviour thereof in the time of trouble, why shouldest Thou be a stranger in the land, and as a wayfaring man that turneth aside to tarry for a night? Then ours shall be the apostle's thanksgiving: *Most gladly there-* 2 Cor. xii. 9.
fore will I rather glory in my infirmities,

that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

Times of Chastisement need not be useless times.

This once more leads on to another thought of great consolation, bearing on our supposed uselessness under certain visitations of God. For some are disposed to say that their time of affliction is all lost time, and it bitterly aggravates the chastisement, already severe enough, to feel that they are but cumberers of the ground. When we discover how lightly we valued our former opportunities, we wish for them back; yet wishing does not bring them back; we long, but long in vain, once more to be permitted to give a cup of cold water to one for whom Christ died. Well, it is something to be humbled for past remissness, and to discover mercy which we have not valued as it deserved. Yet inaction need not be uselessness. The land that lies fallow under the winter frost is mellowing for the spring sowing. It is very possible to be useless amid a great deal of fussy and showy activity, and to be seeking the praise of men, not of God. We cannot be useless while we are doing and

suffering God's will, whatever it may be found to be. And we can always do that. If we are bringing forth the fruits of the Spirit, we are not useless. And we can always do that. If we are increasing in the knowledge of God's will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, we are not useless. And we can always do that. While we pray we cannot be useless. And we can always do that. God will always find us a work to do, a niche to fill, a place to serve, nay, even a soul to save, when it is His will, and not ours, that we desire to do; and if it should please Him that we should sit still for the rest of our lives, doing nothing else but waiting on Him, and waiting for Him, why should we complain? *Here is the patience of the saints.* Rev. xiv. 12.

So, when sorrow comes to you, or to those you love, do not shrink from it, as from some cruel torturer, but welcome in it an angel to bring you near to God. Do not fear, do not fear. *This light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.* Our God is 2 Cor. iv. 17.

enough for every one of us, and when we pass behind the cloud, it is that we may see His face, and our joy be full. We must not indeed say, Envy those in sorrow. That would be aiming far too high for human nature. But we may say, Bless God for His gracious purpose towards them; and let your prayer for them rather be, that they may be able to receive and retain all He offers them, than that they may be too soon delivered from their pain. It is natural to pity them, yet if we could look into the invisible world, we should see that they who are pitied by the angels, and whom, therefore, we ought to pity, are not those whom Christ is taking apart into the wilderness to rest a while, but those who are left alone to be filled with their own devices, and whom an unbroken prosperity is hardening against God.

Soon, very soon, the Good Shepherd will no longer be restoring our souls, or leading us painfully in the paths of righteousness; for sin will be a thing of the past, and we shall be walking together on the everlasting hills. Yet, if our glory depends on our ser-

vice, it also depends on our sanctity. In heaven we shall still serve Him; but only while on earth can we drink the cup that our Master drank of, or be baptised with the baptism wherewith He was baptised.

IV.

THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH

IV.

THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH.

"YEA, THOUGH I WALK THROUGH THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH, I WILL FEAR NO EVIL: FOR THOU ART WITH ME; THY ROD AND THY STAFF THEY COMFORT ME."

> *"Connôitre la mort sans la craindre, c'est le plus haut dégré de perfection où l'esprit humain soit capable de parvenir: c'est le plus haut point de félicité où il puisse arriver dans cette vallée de misère."*
>
> —SAURIN.

TO ascertain precisely what we are to understand by the "Presence of Christ," we must separate it from a truth, with which it may easily be confounded, and distinguish it from the doctrine, in which it is virtually contained.

What is not meant by the Presence of Christ.

It is not, for instance, a mere physical

nearness, identical with the truth of the Divine Omnipresence, which, expressed more accurately, is rather the presence of all things before God, than God present to all things. For that truth may be as much a thought of terror as of consolation, and equally affects inanimate with animate things, irrational with rational, bad men with good men, hell with heaven. And though God cannot dwell in our hearts without blessing us with His presence, though to have Him in us must be to have Him with us, and so all that we actually need for our provision and safety is infallibly ensured for those who trust in Him; the sun behind the clouds can never be the same quickening and fertilising power on the chilled and wet earth, as when shining out in its strength. Therefore we ask for the light of God's countenance to give us peace; remembering that even Jesus, when His Father hid Himself, found it heavier than He could bear, for to be forsaken was harder than to die.

The Divine Presence symbolised under the rod and staff of the Good Shepherd means

the sense of Christ's sympathy, and the assurance of Christ's aid.

The meaning of sympathy.

Sympathy, let us observe, is more than love, being love perfected by experience. It is impossible to sympathise with what we do not fully understand, and some things can be understood only by the actual personal endurance of them. We must ourselves have been ill, quite to sympathise with the sick; the rich may be kind to the poor, but to know what it is to want daily bread, our own shelf must have been empty. When we seek comfort, do not we naturally go to those whose actual wounds have shed the same kind of blood as ours? Our little children love us, and when death has robbed us of the best treasure of our home, it comforts us that we still have them to love, we feel as we take them on our knee, we are not bankrupts yet. But a great gulf separates us from them; they are sorry for us, they try to understand our sadness, they look into our face, and kiss us more tenderly than ever, they mean to be good, if only to make us happy. Yet they cannot understand what we have lost, and we

do not attempt to explain it; neither do we complain that their tears are too soon dried, or that in a few days they are as merry as ever. The loud laughter ringing down the nursery stairs, the wooden horse running swiftly over the floor, somehow, after the first jar, do not really disturb us. We are not so unjust as to think them unfeeling because they are not like ourselves: still, the end of it is, we mourn alone.

The sympathy of Christ.

Now Christ's sympathy is the fellow feeling of one who, loving us to begin with, and so disposed to pity us, understands what we suffer, for He has suffered it Himself, nay, suffers it all with us, for His life and our life are one. *I am the Vine, ye are the branches.* When the vine is pruned, and the sap runs out, a living pain shudders through the entire tree. But *who shall separate us from the love of Christ?* Nothing, indeed, outside of us can do it. Satan has no power over us but what we are pleased to give him. Why should Christ rob Himself of His purchased possession? How can He change, or tire, or forget us, who is the *same yesterday, and to-*

John xv. 5.

Rom. viii. 35.

Heb. xiii. 8.

day, and for ever? If we lose this blessed sympathy, it is because we ourselves throw it away. No hand can cut us off from Christ but our own.

Yet He is God as well as man, and the comfort of His presence consists mainly in this, that He is able as well as willing to save. How often have we to confess, sadly, if not bitterly, the helplessness of mere sympathy. It is useless to inquire, when the end is just the same, which is the more mortifying, will without power, or power without will. But our Master Christ has both. St Paul had learned not only his Lord's tenderness, but also His strength. Let us learn with the apostle that the presence of Christ means the sympathy of a kind friend, and the help of a strong one; the right arm and right hand of one who, rejoicing with us when we rejoice, and weeping with us when we weep, can cover our head in the day of battle. When pain is sharp, when illness is tedious, when hopes are disappointed, when temptation is strong, then let our question be, *Is anything too hard* Gen. xviii. 14.

for the Lord? Then let our consolation be,

Col. ii. 9. *In Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.*

The Presence of Christ communicated through the Spirit.

For though He is not now on earth to tell us, face to face, of His love, He comes to us, He speaks with us, through His

Rom v. 5. Spirit. *The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.* It is the Spirit's work to glorify Jesus.

John xvi. 14. *He shall receive of mine, and show it unto you.* It is our privilege to receive the Spirit,

Eph. v. 18. and we are bidden to be *filled* with Him; and who shall say, what light and joy, what liberty and holiness, what power and usefulness might be ours, if we would but believe. Yet this too often is just what we will not do. Christ's sympathy seems much less real, and much farther off than man's; and Christ's power, which is possible enough when we read of it in an inspired book, seems impossible when we try to apply it to our present difficulties; and our hearts are so full of earthly cares and earthly posses-

Luke ii. 7. sions, that once more it is true, there is *no room for Him in the inn.* Oh, our incon-

sistency and insincerity! Oh, the deliberateness, with which we deceive ourselves. Oh, the resoluteness, with which we set ourselves to the utterly impossible task of following Christ, without taking up the cross! If we could but make up our mind to decide on one or the other, and to be honest about it; either to choose Christ and to be altogether Christians, or to choose Mammon, and to be altogether for this world, there would be gain each way, and no one would be disappointed or deceived. But now Christ loses, the Church loses, the world loses; and, as to ourselves, even if at last we are saved, as through the fire, what a loss of peace now, and of glory to come!

Christ's presence is always blessed, for the still moments and for the noisy moments, when we are at work and when we are at rest, when we mourn and when we sing. Is there ever any moment, when we can afford to lose Him, or when He can be an intrusive guest?

Special times when we need His presence.

Yet there are times when we specially need Him, and when, therefore, He specially

offers Himself. How much we read in the Bible about fear, and how continually we are warned against it! For though fear, like anger, is an original element of our nature,

Psalm cxi. 10. and *the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom*, there is much fear that dishonours God and debases and enfeebles men.

The greatest of the saints have had their moments of fear. Abram feared, when he went down into Egypt; Moses, when God sent him to Pharaoh; Elijah, when he fled from Jezebel. One of the grandest passages in the Old Testament is the Divine expostu-

Isa. li. 12, 13. lation with Israel: *I, even I, am He that comforteth you: who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the Son of man which shall be made as grass; and forgettest the Lord thy Maker?* One of the most blessed promises in the Old Testament

Isa. xliii. 1, 2. is in the book of the same prophet: *Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt*

not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.

PERHAPS the most common, and human, and reasonable of all kinds of fear is the fear of death. Yet even here, as the psalmist tells us, the Divine presence is sufficient, *Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me.* *Fear of death reasonable.* Psalm xxiii. 4.

The expression, "shadow of death," occurs eleven times in Scripture, viz., five times in Job, four times in the Psalms, once in Jeremiah, once in Amos; and we are yet more familiar with the image through its introduction into the "Pilgrim's Progress," where Christian, after his victory over Apollyon, and long before he reaches the Celestial City, passes through the valley with terrible conflict, and is joined by Faithful soon after he comes out.

I have called the fear of death reasonable, and it is surely fair to say so, if love of life is a divinely ordered law for us, and if but for *Why reasonable.*

that fear men would rush much oftener than they do into its mysterious darkness with all their sins on their head. The great bulk of men, indeed, whom youth and vigour seem to separate from it by an almost infinite interval, seldom think of it, will not look at it; and what we steadily ignore can hardly cause us acute alarm. Besides, it is hard really to face it until it faces us. Human nature will not needlessly, cannot easily, by mere force of fancy, or in the gratuitous indulgence of a morbid whim, lay itself down with Charles V. within the narrow walls of a tomb, to dramatise its dissolution. Only, when sentence of death is pronounced, and we feel that there is no postponing it, do we rouse ourselves in earnest to think what it must really be. And then, let us confess, it *is* a dark valley that opens out before us, and many ghastly shadows are flitting through it. It is a real enemy, and it must be conquered. For most men it is something more than the mere fluttering of the wing of the impatient spirit, it is somewhat harder than the unconscious dropping of the garment of our

mortality. We must not overrate it, but we dare not despise it; and if in a few rare natures there be the sublime spectacle of triumph in death; if some, like Hopeful, through the exceeding vividness of their faith, and the ardour of their hope, and the intenseness of their love, long for it, and welcome it, it will be safer for most of us to wait quietly till it comes, knowing Who bids it come, neither shrinking from it in unmanly terror, nor rushing to meet it in hysterical joy.

> "When the shore is won at last,
> Who will count the billows past?" *

Thou art with me: this is all we care for; it is the presence of Christ that robs death of its sting.

Valley of shadow of death, sometimes distinct from death itself.

Here, however, let it be observed that the valley of the shadow of death is sometimes quite a distinct thing from death itself. We may pass through it, as Hezekiah passed through it, and contend with all its terrors, and yet live for years afterwards; though,

* Keble.

indeed, the bitterness of death will be for ever passed, and the shock of his conflict broken. It is also possible to die without passing through it at all; as when men die suddenly, or with so short a transition from time into eternity as never really to have faced what was at hand.

Explanation of this.

The valley of the shadow of death is a chapter by itself in human experience. Religious men pass through it, as well as irreligious, and often it has nothing whatever to do with that all-absorbing sense of sin and unworthiness, which has an object of its own in the Divine purposes, and which no one need wonder to feel, when approaching the Throne of God. It is, perhaps, commoner in middle age than in childhood, which cannot appreciate the full blessedness of life, or than in old age, weary with the toil of it; and is most frequently seen in men, who combine a strong vitality with peculiar powers of enjoyment. This, moreover, is certain, that those who have not gone through it, cannot know it by hearsay; those who have, will never forget, if they

live fifty years afterwards, the sadness and solitariness of its gloom.

Illustration of it.

But a brief illustration may help to explain my meaning. Travellers, who have crossed from Switzerland into France by the old post road over the Jura, will remember their farewell gaze on the Lake of Geneva, and the green plain, and the white crest of Mont Blanc losing itself in the clouds; will recall also the grand prospect of Burgundy with its fertile meadows and golden vineyards suddenly opening out at their feet. But both these views are not to be enjoyed at the same moment. Between the turn of the road, that shuts out the panorama of Switzerland, and the opening in the pass, which gives us our first glimpse of France, there is a tedious and gloomy interval among sterile rocks, and frowning precipices, hills that shut out the sun, and barrenness that forbids verdure.

Now, this may be offered as a most imperfect representation of that sad and dark period in the history of some men, when life seems all behind us, with its precious

joys and its noble duties, and when the glory, that is coming, has not yet burst upon our view. To tell us, at such a moment, that our depression is physical, may explain it, but does not remove it. To share it with those whom we love best in all the world, would be selfishly casting on them a burden they could not carry; yet, keeping it to ourselves, only throws it further in. In such a condition of mind and body, everything we see, or hear, or do, or read, aggravates the symptoms of the disease. Are the journals full of some great event to come off presently? The first thought is, "I shall never live to see it." Children playing, men going to and fro to their tasks, the changing aspects of nature, the sight of a passing friend at whose side in former days we delighted to labour, the stir of the tide of life all round us, the infant on our knee, the wife or husband at our side, the possessions of our home, the companions of our youth: all these are for ever in some subtle and keen way stirring up the associations of the grave, and telling us with a whisper, which we never

fail to catch as from one standing at our shoulder, "Thou must leave all these, and come away with me."

No doubt this varies according to individual temperament; much of it, too, is morbid, irrational, and almost wrong. Yet God has His own purpose to fulfil out of it; and we may be sure that a discipline so mysterious, and perhaps in some of its features so comparatively rare, has blessed lessons to teach those who survive it; lessons, not so much how to die, but how to live, with a more tender sympathy, a more living zeal, a more profound humility, and a more ardent gratitude.

Such is the valley of the shadow of death. Now let us see what death is itself.

What death itself is.

DEATH means loss, solitude, and retribution. Certainly it is loss, loss of all we know, and possess, and enjoy, and love. It is loss of the blue sky, and the sweet flowers, and the rolling sea, and the purple hills; it is loss of home with its living treasures, of life with its stirring

activities, of science with its secrets and art with its skill; it is loss of the joy of travel, of the rapture of music, of the society of books; it is loss of the fireside of winter, of the sweet freshness of the summer morning, of the ripeness of autumn, of the greenness of spring. And then (unless the hurrying away be more premature still) just when the enjoyment of these things is deepening, and our possessions are accumulating, as the dreams of youth become the solid occupations of manhood, as the heat and burden of the day give place in their turn to the repose and memories of age; when the tide of life is at its full, when the pinnacle is reached, the prize won, the fortune made, the children reared; when our mistakes are forgotten and our errors condoned, when neighbours esteem us, and strangers respect us; when we have learned (after innumerable failures) in some slight degree how to conquer self, how to use money, how to do good without doing harm, how to choose the right way without first going the wrong; then, at the very moment when we are most capable of making others happy

by our kindness, and good by our example, and wise by our experience, the enemy who has been waiting for us ever since we were born, and who was content to wait, knowing that we could not escape him, comes to fetch us away; and we must go. *Behold, Thou hast made my days as an hand-breadth; and mine age is as nothing before Thee: verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity.* Psalm xxxix. 5.

Death is solitude.

Death is also solitude. "Je mourrai seul."* Of course all sorrow is solitary. For though the outward facts and features of our sorrow are in some measure identical with those of other men, and produce effects which are common to the race, one man's moral nature is so different from another man's, and the shafts which pierce us are so variously aimed, so differently weighted, that each of us, besides what he endures in common with his fellows, has his own pain, which no one else can suffer quite in the same way.

But in death there is a solitude, which exists in no other kind of sorrow, for we only die once; and not one of the friends, who

* Pascal.

stand by watching us, can know from personal experience, what dying means. Possibly they have been very near it. They may have stood on the edge of the dark river, and its cold waves may have washed over their feet; they may have taken their last farewells, and set their house in order, and looked right into the eternal world. But they did not die, and to expect death is not the same thing as to endure it. For the first time, perhaps, in all our lives, we are starting on a journey which we must travel alone; and those, who most wish to be with us, and whom we, too, most wish for, must stay behind, while we go on. They can bless us, they can tell us of their sweet and passionate and undying love; they can pray, and the last sound we hear is the name of Him, who is the Resurrection and the Life; but the end of it is, that we go, and they stay, and never is human love felt to be more utterly impotent than when it watches an ebbing life.

And retribution.

And death means retribution. *For God shall bring every work into judgment, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.* It is quite

Eccles. xii. 14.

true that conscience does not always wake up before death, and Lord Bacon has observed that there is not a single quality in our moral nature, which has not at some time or other mastered the fear to die. But it is also true, that in a great multitude of instances conscience at such times does make cowards of us; and when it is too late to do what we ought to have done, and to repent of what we ought not to have done, prayer is but the spasm of a panic,—we fear hell, not God. And yet, not only to the unforgiven and impenitent soul, drifting helplessly on towards its final doom, is the thought of death a thing of sadness; it is often for a time both a humiliation and a bitterness to the soul, which long before had cast its sins on Christ, and found rest and peace through His blood. Life come to an end, and so little done in it! Sin still so strong, the world still so powerful, self still so dominant, prayer still so hard! We recall past opportunities, and feel how sinfully we have neglected them; this soul and that soul have come in our way, and we did not even try to do them good. How

much money we have wasted on selfish vanity; how little we have denied ourselves for the sake of Christ or His kingdom! Talking, listening, planning, beginning! Of that indeed there has been an abundance; but what will there be to show Christ, when He returns, of actual finished work, that will stand the fire?

The presence of Christ in death.
1 John v. 4.

YET even in death *this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Thou art with me,* said David, and we have yet the more sure word of the New Testament.

Heb. ii. 14, 15. *Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same; that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.*

For if death is loss, Christ can make up for it ten thousandfold. Is our earthly life ended? He gives us a long life, even for ever and ever. Does death sever us from those we love on earth? Christ unites us to those we love in heaven. He takes us

from sin to sinlessness, from perfect weakness to perfect strength, from restlessness to rest, from faith to sight, from men to angels, from cold prayers to the song that ceases not day nor night, from a world lying in wickedness to the just made perfect in sight of the throne. If Christ cannot, or will not do all this for us, then He is nothing to us, and why do we believe on Him? If He can, and will, *to die is gain.* Phil. i. 21.

As to solitude, who knows so much of solitude in life as the Man of sorrows? Who has tasted so bitterly of solitude in death as He who said of Himself by the prophet, *I have trodden the wine-press alone?* Isa. lxiii. 3. His life was eminently one long solitude in its condition and nature, in its aims and purposes, in its hopes and fears. Not only by His enemies, but by His disciples, not only by His disciples, but by His brethren, was He hindered, and disappointed, and misunderstood. Prayer was the only real interruption of His loneliness; and when He died, there was but one apostle to stand by His cross.

The solitude of death is filled with Jesus!

He knows it all, for He has tasted it all. He who has died that He might save us, is with us, because He has saved us, to sustain us in the dizziness of our fainting consciousness, and to lull us with a brother's tenderness into our sleep in Him.

As Saviour. For once more we are sinners, and to complete the assurance of our faith, He who is our dearest, kindest, strongest friend in the world is also our own Saviour. He has saved us from the guilt of sin, and from the power of sin, and from the punishment of sin. *He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed.* And so if Satan comes (as he often does come) at our last hour to accuse us bitterly in the court of our own conscience, to cast doubts on our pardon, to wound us with bitter recollections of past shortcomings, and to lash us into the sin of despair, at such moments let the tempted soul instantly cast itself on Jesus to hide in Him, to cling to Him; let it bid the tempter go to Him, our surety and

Isa. liii. 5.

representative, who long ago made Himself responsible for us, when we made our great exchange, of laying on Him our debts, and taking from Him His righteousness. The one name we utter shall be JESUS, the one answer that we make shall be JESUS, the one plea we urge shall be JESUS. We know that we have no suffering of our own to offer as an atonement; but this we also know that —Christ has died. We know only too well that we have no righteousness of our own to prefer, as our claim for heaven; but if any one asks how we expect to get there, we take the question to Him who has called Himself *the Way, the Truth, and the Life,* John xiv. 6. and the answer comes back, *Ye believe in God,* John xiv. 1. *believe also in me.* Nay, if for a moment we are in darkness, and have no light; if we know not how to deny the suggestion that our iniquities have separated between us and our God; and that the barrier between us is of our own making—well, we are saved, not through joy, but through faith. If we must perish, we will perish clasping the cross, and clinging to the Saviour, quite

sure that He will not suffer the very least of His elect through any pains of death to fall from Him.

What has been said elsewhere about the passing through the valley of death is applicable also here; for as a matter of experience, there is no rule to measure this fear of death, and no principle to determine it; often there is none of it, where it might be most looked for, sometimes it is very terrible where we should have thought it could not come. In some cases the cause is entirely physical, either seated in the constitution, or closely connected with disease; and not unfrequently those, who in the distance have most dreaded it, and on the brightness of whose life it has ever projected a cold and dark shadow, when the time has come, much to their own surprise, have found it but falling asleep.

It does, however, as we have already hinted, sometimes happen, that even with tried Christians a thick mist envelops the soul in its declining hours, and though the setting sun, before it dips under the horizon, bursts out

into gold and flame, it has been sore struggling in thick darkness, and for long it seemed in vain to pray. Now there are at least two purposes which we may reverently suppose God desires to accomplish by a trial of this kind. One is the conversion or edification of those who stand by; the other is the final perfecting of those who suffer. It is a story often told of an eminent servant of God, who had during his lifetime frequently prayed that his happy death might be blessed to an ungodly son, that when his time came, fear and sadness overwhelmed him; not so much the thought of Christ's salvation possessed him, as the fact of his own sinfulness; the joy of heaven faded before his sense of unworthiness of admission there. Yet God, who was wiser than he, answered his prayer in a way that he knew not. *Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.* The careless son, who might not have been affected by his father's happiness, was deeply moved by his father's fear. "If a man like him, after a useful and religious life, fears to die, what is

Why the fear of death is permitted in the case of believers.

John xii. 24.

death likely to be to me? Surely except I repent I shall perish."

Now, for such an end, who would not welcome such a sorrow?

There is yet another reason why it may seem good to God in the last hours of our life to hide His face for a little moment. We may have been leaning too much on outward helps, or on past experience, or on systems of doctrine, and we have not come quite close to God Himself to cleave with all our strength to Him. Therefore He must teach us, and through us others, that orthodox opinions cannot give us peace; that sermons, and sacraments, and ordinances, cannot give us peace; that pious parents, faithful pastors, exemplary friends, cannot give us peace; that belonging to this sect, or pronouncing this shibboleth, or confessing this creed, or observing this ritual, cannot give us peace; that the esteem and commendation of our neighbours cannot give us peace; in a word, that all covering of our own must be torn into shreds, that all unsound hopes must be utterly disappointed, that every shelter but the shelter

of the Saviour's cross must be swept away before the winds of heaven, that every other name as a way of salvation must be as sounding brass, or tinkling cymbal, save JESUS, SON OF GOD. Sooner or later, all this must come to us; it is better if it comes before, but better then than never; and dark as the declining hour may be, severe as the actual crisis may be, it comes to an end at last. The fight is won, the cross is clasped, the light comes, the joy comes, for the Saviour comes; and He who waited only to be more gracious, Who hid Himself only to shine out more glorious at last, Who denied, that in the end He might be more bountiful, Who seemed to frown only because He purposed to smile, comes and whispers, *Son, be of good cheer; thy sins are* Matt. ix. 2. *forgiven thee;* and the rough water is passed, the ship glides into harbour, *and the rest,* Acts xxvii. 44. *some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship. And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land.*

Reader, how wilt thou die?

DOES the thought cross any one who reads this paper, "How shall I myself

die"? Indeed, it is something worth thinking about. Of course we all wish to die happily. There are many Balaams, if there are few Pauls. Yet it is something worse than folly to forget that death hangs on life; to make death the crisis and life the trifle; whereas death merely pronounces the verdict, life settles it: it is solemn to die, only because it is awful to live.

First, then, what we all of us need to learn more is how to walk with God hour by hour as a man with his friend; not so much to be continually going in and out of His presence as to be always living in it, without effort thinking of Him, without insincerity consulting Him, without hesitation obeying Him, without embarrassment speaking of Him. Instead of endeavouring, in the happy simplicity of an almost unconscious religion, to set Christ before us in all we do, to have Him with us wherever we go, to make joy safe by asking Him to share it, to rob care of its carefulness by casting it as it comes all on Him, we are too apt to separate prayer from life, heaven from earth, holiness from

happiness, as if human affections lowered Divine aspirations, as if we could be more like God by being less like men. Thus when we go to meet Him we have formally to prepare ourselves for solemn audience. It is almost as if we had to unclothe ourselves of the earthly and to clothe ourselves with the heavenly. Reverence! how can we be reverent enough; but surely He prefers the simple trustfulness of kinsfolk to the distant homage of strangers; and if we made it more our endeavour to bring every thought, every word, every habit, every employment, every recreation, every commonest act of life into captivity to Christ, and so into harmony and fellowship with Him, it would not violently interrupt us, as it often does, to lay down the task of the moment, to hold intercourse with Him.

Conditions of Christ's presence.

THERE are three chief conditions of abiding in Christ's presence—obedience, meditation, and love. We must obey Him. *Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.* How is it possible, I

Matt. v. 8.

will not say to desire, but even to endure the thought of Christ's company, if we are wilfully wandering from Him, or resisting Him, loving what He hates, or doing what He forbids? It is a question how many there are of His own true people who, if told, as one of old was told, *The master is come, and calleth for thee,* would rise to go to Him with a glow of happy surprise.

John xi. 28.

Then there must be more of secret, and continuous, and real thinking of Him. If prayer is the worship of the heart, meditation is that of the mind. Pascal has said, "Thought makes the greatness of men." Why is there so little meditation among Christians? such a lack of that quietness, and stillness, and thoughtfulness of soul and spirit, in which chiefly the dews of the Holy Spirit fall on us, and the life of Christ grows? There is much activity of hands and feet, much listening, far too much talking. Yet where the heart is, there the treasure is; and it is in human nature to think of what we love.

For once more we shall seek Christ, we shall

be with Him, we shall think of Him just in proportion as we love Him. We never find it irksome or dull to be with those we love; we always find something to speak of to them. Oh, to love Christ better! One true throb of love to Him is worth more in His sight than the thrones of a hundred kings. If we really loved Christ, and trusted Him, we should seek His presence to make life happy as well as death easy; and then, when the summons does come, when the most unutterable, the most momentous of all convictions seizes us—that at length our own life is over, it will be but like going out of one room into another; we shall indeed be more than conquerors through Him that loved us, if His love has been the reality of our life.

It is appointed unto men once to die, and after that the judgment. Heb. ix. 27. Mr Alexander Smith, in one of his essays in "Dreamthorp," has strikingly observed that death gives a kind of dignity to the very meanest and shabbiest of human beings. When we are dead, our enemies cease to envy us, our

friends love us better than ever, some admire, all pity. But why will not we go a little further, and, not content with imagining our friends and neighbours in the sublime repose of death, also think of them in the vast spirit-land, and standing under the great White Throne? It is in the power of every one of us to make some one fitter to go before the judgment-seat of Christ. Yet is there anything so evident or so inexplicable as the paralysis that affects so great a multitude of professing Christians in their intercourse with those who plainly know not God? Is it that we do not believe that souls can be lost, or is it that we do not care? Either there is a hell, or there is not. If there is not, then how do we know that there is a heaven? If there is, and if Jesus died to deliver us from it, and if there is one human being on this earth whom we can influence, praying where we cannot speak, where we can speak praying too, let us do what we may with all possible kindness, and wisdom, and humility, and earnestness, to bid men flee from the wrath to come, and to win our Saviour souls.

So, whether for ourselves, or for those we love, we will fear no evil, if only Christ be ours. Death has yet to come; and we do not know in what shape it will come; it may be quite near, or it may still be far away.

> "Thou inevitable day,
> When a voice to me shall say
> Thou must rise and come away;
> Art thou distant, art thou near,
> Wilt thou seem more dark or clear,
> Day with more of hope or fear?"*

Anyhow, we will not dwell too much on it; instead of looking down into the open grave we will look up for the glorious appearing; we know of a happy country across the dark river; we have heard of the shining ones who will lead us up the hill. It is no new temptation, but one that is common to man. He who has helped others through it will help us through it. Those gone before us, who have got it over, found Him near them. He who was faithful to them will be faithful to us, and to those whom we leave behind.

Do we, however, sometimes ask, in the secret of our own thoughts, which of us will

* Trench.

go first? Banish them as we will, do not sad fears sometimes force themselves on us, as we think of the whitening hair, or the thinned hands, or the pale cheeks, or the tottering footsteps of those we love? Well, they may go first, but the interval between them and us in the balance of eternity is but as the single tick of a pendulum. *Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.* The bed of death is the presence-chamber of Jesus. We who stand by cannot see with our mortal eyes what is vouchsafed to those who are putting on immortality; but if we cannot know, we may at least conjecture, and the radiant joy that sometimes lights up the wan countenance of a dying Christian, tells of an Invisible Presence that is shining there. It is a solemn moment as the soul passes away; yet for us only is it a time of sadness. They, if they could speak, would say, Weep not for me, but sing with me, *O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?*

Psalm xxx. 5.

1 Cor. xv. 55.

And He who goes with them stays with us. For He is in Paradise with those that

sleep in Him. He is on earth with those that wait for Him. He can think of the living as well as of the dying; of those who have still to grapple with the last struggle, as well as of those who sing the conqueror's song.

So we pass out of the sight of our dead, wondering at our own calmness. Thankfulness for the glorious change passed on them absorbs all selfish thought of the grief come on us. We too feel, that if we have lost much, we have gained much; earth is beneath us; we have stood on the very threshold of heaven, and the love of Christ is more real than ever. On the morrow, when we go out of our chamber to do our work, to meet our friends, to feel our loss; He who was with us in the quiet night, meets us in the glare of the morning; we remember the promise, *Thy brother shall rise again.* John xi. 23.

V.

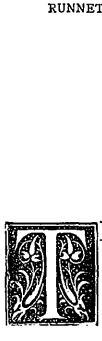
THE TABLE OF GOD.

V.

THE TABLE OF GOD.

'THOU PREPAREST A TABLE BEFORE ME IN THE PRESENCE OF MINE ENEMIES; THOU ANOINTEST MY HEAD WITH OIL; MY CUP RUNNETH OVER."

> "*Il n'y a que deux voies pour se rendre heureux et content; l'une de remplir tous nos desirs, l'autre de les borner a ce que nous pouvons posseder. La premiére est impossible en cette vie; ainsi c'est une folie d'entreprendre de se contenter en ce monde par cette voie.*"
>
> —PASCAL.



THERE are two views of life, and each of them is sufficiently consistent with the statements of Scripture, with human experience, and with personal faith in God. Nay, we may go even further, and say about them, that most of us have, from time to time, alternately inclined to each of them, and that character as well as circumstances may

Two views of life.

have a great deal to do in forming our choice.

One view is, that life, as it is now, is sad, vain, and burdensome; at the best but a mitigated misfortune, at the worst a pressing evil, from which wise men, if they could, might well take wings to flee away. It is a conflict with sin, in which sin ever has some advantage over us; it is a struggle with calamity, from which we never escape without lasting scars; it is a pursuit after duty, a race in which we are never winners; and make of it what we will, it is an exile from God and from the face of His Christ. No doubt, life is God's ordinance; therefore, we submit to it. It is His talent, and we must make the best use of it we can. Our Saviour has lived it, and we have His sympathy; it is our training-school for heaven, and we earnestly wish to fit ourselves for the glory that shall be revealed. Yet, what with the sins that corrupt us, and the mistakes that vex us, and the cares that distract us, and the duties that overpower us, and the necessities that

engross us, and the infirmities that humble us, and the disappointments that sour us, and the changes that unsettle us, and the afflictions that crush us, and the losses that sadden us, and the temptations that are the very atmosphere we breathe, all we can say about it is, the sooner it is over the better; Lord Jesus, come quickly, and take unto the rest that remaineth for Thy people, the souls that long for thee.

But there is also another view, and as I venture to think, far more free, more elevating, more noble, giving God more glory, and man more comfort, tracing through the most chequered life the unfailing thread of an eternal purpose, explaining in the most afflicted life the meaning of the Providence of God, and of the sorrows of men. This view of it makes life a gift for which to be thankful, a blessing in which to rejoice, a trust to be most jealously guarded, a most precious occasion for learning, and serving, and imitating our Lord, not one hour of which may we safely throw away in listlessness

and carelessness; nay, on the use of which, far more than some of us think of, shall depend the nature of our service, and the measure of our glory in heaven. Of course sin has brought a veil over its brightness, and death through sin has made every blessing insecure, and every prospect uncertain: here is not our rest; to depart and to be with Christ, when the time comes for it, must be far better; and if we try to make it our rest, we are soon painfully reminded that we are but strangers and pilgrims. Nevertheless, the really Christian view of life, the view which justifies Creation, and explains Redemption, which at once both magnifies God's goodness and our responsibility, is that which discovers in all His dealings a most merciful plan for our real welfare, which recognises in all our troubles the merciful visitation of a Divine pity, which, while it removes from us the blessings that are becoming snares to us, invariably offers us the joy that it is safe for us to possess. It is also the view that enables us to walk in the spirit

of liberty, that not only permits but encourages us to use with moderateness and faith and thankfulness, the blessings which God gives us so richly to enjoy, in cultivating our natural tastes, and enjoying our social relaxations, and gladly recognising, whether in art, or science, or books, or music, the appropriate cultivation of divinely-given faculties, and the kind alleviation of the toils and worries of life. In the spirit of the apostle, who assures us, that *every creature of God is good, and* 1 Tim. iv. 4. *nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving;* when God places us in a green pasture, we will not instantly begin to think that there is a snake in the grass. There is no more need to fear joy than sorrow; nay, joy has a wonderful power for widening, and softening, and elevating the heart. While very watchful over ourselves, we still need not distrust either God or His gifts; and our language at all times shall be, *Bless the Lord, O my soul,* Psalm ciii. 1–5 *and forget not all His benefits; who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee*

with loving-kindness and tender mercies; who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's.

If it were necessary to establish what has already been said by precise statements of Scripture, surely we may find proof of it in the verse given at the head of this chapter. *Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies; thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.* Here we see the certainty of the Divine supplies, and the abundance and richness of them under whatever circumstances; and if it be objected that David's was but an individual and an exceptional case, it may fairly be answered—on the contrary, it all tells in our favour. David's history is one of risings and fallings, dangers and deliverances, chastisements and blessings, noble acts and terrible inconsistencies, severely and notoriously punished. If, at the close of such a life, David could write in this language of God's dealings with him, it is not too much to say that any one can. The difference of one life from another in outward prosperity is probably much less

than is generally supposed. But the difference in the spirit with which God's dealings with us are met and borne is very great indeed; and as that is a matter over which we all have control, so is it also the secret which determines for all, whether they work together for good or for evil.

The immediate allusion in these words is evidently to the touching and bountiful hospitality with which the aged Barzillai welcomed David when an exile from his home and country. But they have their historical illustrations elsewhere also. In the wilderness for instance, God furnished a table for His people, and man did eat angels' food, and He sent them meat to the full. Again, when Elijah fled from the face of Jezebel, as he slept under a juniper tree, *an angel touched him, and said unto him, Arise and eat. And he looked, and, behold, there was a cake baken on the coals, and a cruse of water at his head.* In the New Testament we have a greater instance still, when He who was both David's son, and David's Lord, after His conflict with Satan, was ministered to by angels. And

2 Sam. xvii. 27-29.

1 Kings xix. 5, 6.

by way of both indicating and expounding the distinct ideas contained severally in the two paragraphs of the verse, first let us meditate on the former one, which declares the abundance of the Divine supplies under circumstances of conflict and danger; and then inquire how the latter one, which is a most significant declaration of the blessedness, in all things, of a true believer's life, has its actual verification in the individual experience of sincere Christians, and is at the same time consistent with the occasional and apparent contradictions to it in the providential government of God.

THE psalmist speaks here, as so often elsewhere, of his personal enemies. The history of his life is a history of one who, whether in the vindication of private wrongs, or in incessant conflict with his country's enemies, had been, in God's own words, *a man of war*, and *had shed blood*. Some of these enemies he had no doubt made for himself; but most of them must have been so through the nature of the task allotted to him, which

1 Chron. xxviii. 3.

was to consolidate into one united and compact kingdom the dismembered sovereignty he had inherited from Saul.

On personal enemies.

The difficulty practically begins, when we apply the words to our own circumstances. Many persons are unconscious of enemies of any kind. If we have such, and it is through our own fault, why do not we hasten to be reconciled, and to turn them into friends? Or, if the only way in which we can really use the words is to interpret them spiritually, what sense is there in saying that in the presence of spiritual temptations God spreads us a feast?

What to do with them.

To take these points one by one: first, with respect to personal enemies—enemies not only in the sense of those who, as in David's case, would, if they could, deliberately do us harm, even perhaps to the extent of killing us; but also in the sense of those who, either from a supposed slight or injury, or from envy and jealousy of us, or from that utter opposition and contrariety of nature which in some persons creates a kind of repulsion and dislike, almost amounting to

enmity, let us try to see clearly what the statement really means, and how we are justified in using it as a promise and consolation. Of course, if we have made any one our enemy by injustice, or neglect, or misconduct of any kind, we have no right to expect our Lord to be on our side in the matter, for that would be expecting Him to be on the side of what is wrong. Such enemies we should hasten to move out of their enmity, by the frank acknowledgment of our error, (supposing it to be worth speaking about,) and by the entire reparation, so far as possible, of the injury done them. When we have been altogether wrong, it must be the right course for us honestly to say so, and, disagreeable though it may be, to ask to be forgiven. But when, as so often happens, there may be wrong on both sides, in such a case a manly and candid explanation may possibly convince them that our error, if real and painful, has been neither intentional nor malicious. When they hear our side, and see the question from our point of view, they may gladly consent to come

half-way to meet us, and to shake cordial hands over a buried quarrel.

All of us, moreover, in some degree, and for various reasons, know of individuals, whom we much prefer not to meet, to whom, when we meet them, we never know what to say, they so twist or dispute our words; about whom, quite consistently with a sincere respect for their many excellent qualities, we on the whole feel that the less we see of them the better, till we are safe in the home where it will be impossible either to be misunderstood or misrepresented, and where perfect love will cast out fear. Such a state of feeling need not involve a sinful uncharitableness; nay, it is almost inevitable for any one who is in the habit of speaking the plain truth, without pausing to ask if it is likely to be palatable; who goes straight on in what conscience tells him to be the path of duty, never flattering, never bribing; rebuking sin when he sees it, checking misrepresentation when he hears it, confounding slander wherever and whenever he comes across it, and just doing and saying the

thing that is right, as God shows it him, without respect of persons, and indifferent to the opinion of the world. And let me add, the enemies we make in this way (I am supposing the entire absence of bitterness and acrimony) we need not too much trouble ourselves about, nor need we be always thinking how we can be reconciled to them. The enmity is theirs, not ours; the injury is ours, not theirs. If they pass us in the street without speaking, let them pass. If they do not want us, perhaps others do; and the world is large enough for us both. A manly nature ought to have dignity enough of its own to blunt the sharpness of pins and needles. Still, if sometimes we are vexed by it, (and some natures are far more sensitive, much less robust than others,) let us remember for our comfort, that if conscience is on our side, Christ is also; He, the friend that sticketh closer than a brother never despises the least sorrow of the very least of His people; He wishes us to cast our burdens upon Him, and to come to Him when we are weary and heavy-laden; no

man ever suffered as He has suffered from the strife of tongues.

Spiritual enemies.

BUT let us also consider these enemies from a spiritual point of view, and see under the figure of a table spread in the wilderness, that plentiful provision of grace and power which Christ supplies to His tempted people in their hour of need. The more we look out into the world, and the more that we ponder our own inward history, the more convinced we must be of a personal spiritual foe ever striving to make us deny *the Lord that bought us*, the more fully must we appreciate, from an increasing experience about them, the terrible force of St Paul's words, that we *wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of darkness in this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.*

2 Pet. ii. 1.

Eph. vi. 12.

Temptation is the condition of human life, and to try to flee from it in one shape, is often only to provoke it in another. Every period of life, every class in society, every occupation and calling, duties as well as

pleasures, work as well as rest, contain within them the elements of an incessant temptation, which it is at once our folly to ignore, our discipline to encounter, and our glory to overcome. It is no sin to be tempted, for Jesus, the sinless one, was tempted in all things like as we are, yet without sin. It is no weakness to feel the temptation grievous, for Jesus again *suffered being tempted.* The mistake is to run into temptation of our own accord. The sin is in listening to the voice of the charmer until our hearts go out after the forbidden sweetness, and it is all up with us. The weakness is, in our great terror at the noise of the waves and the blackness of the sky, to gaze upon the danger till we are rapidly sinking into it, and till it is almost too late to call out to Him who rides upon the storm, *Lord, save us: we perish.* Yet if our enemies are here, our Saviour is here as well. *The name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe.* If the assaults of the enemy all but exhaust us, and, like Christian with Apollyon, our sword flies

Heb. ii. 18.

Matt. viii. 25.

Prov. xviii. 10.

out of our hand when we want it most, and the battle is all but decided against us; at the last moment the way to escape shall appear, that we may be able to bear it; for *when the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him.* The table in the wilderness is spread by the Lord's own hand. He who provided a morning meal by the lake of Galilee for His seven disciples, wearied by their night's toil; He who fed the five thousand on their way to the Passover, because He pitied them as sheep having no shepherd, will be to His own tempted and wearied servants, what the good Samaritan was to the wounded traveller, healing their wounds, supplying their needs, and comforting their hearts.

Isa. lix. 19.

The Lord's Supper.

And perhaps there is one of His Divine ordinances which is not quite so much looked at as it ought to be in the light of food and strength for harassed and wounded souls. I mean the Lord's Supper. That solemn rite which Christ Himself instituted on the eve of His passion, in anticipation of His own agony and death, and in which He surely

conveys to all who faithfully approach Him the spiritual food of His own body and blood, may most reasonably be regarded as a Divine provision for the refreshment of regenerate souls, torn and depressed by spiritual conflict. To all Christians in turn, come now and then sudden tornado-gusts of temptation, when Satan, hoping to find them off their guard, brings to bear upon them all in a moment the terrible artillery of his malice, and when nothing but a very agony of prayer will bring down from heaven the power and the faith to make him flee away. After such conflicts the Lord's Supper is a most timely and blessed channel of healing, and consolation, and joy. It reminds us of the blood of Christ to purge the conscience, sore with those touches of the spirit of evil which seem ever to leave some pollution behind. It tells us of the death of Christ, as that which has expiated sin, and been made *the chastisement of our peace.* It points us to the resurrection of Christ, whereby we, being dead unto sin, live unto righteousness, through our sharing the risen life of our risen

Isa. liii. 5.

Lord. It brings before us the very person and presence of the ascended and glorified Christ to be our meat and drink, our joy and gladness, our peace and repose, our present possession and our hope of glory, wherein He on His side says to us, *I am the living bread* John vi. 51. *which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever;* wherein we on our side say to Him, *Set me as a* Cant. viii. 6. *seal upon Thine heart, as a seal upon Thine arm.*

BUT the sufficiency of God's supply is not so hard to believe as the abundance or the richness of it. Most can admit that they have enough. It is a different thing, however, and much harder, to acknowledge God's bountifulness as the rule and not the exception of His providential government, and to say, with the psalmist, in the full meaning of the words, *Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.* For in Scripture phraseology, anointing with oil means honour, or at least respect, and the cup filled till it runs over means a plentiful abundance; yet, so far as we can see, hundreds and thousands of good

Christians live and die in a happy obscurity; and, in a hard life of scrambling poverty, are only too thankful if each day, according to their Master's promise, brings with it its daily bread. Let us, then, proceed to consider why these words are true, and how, and when, and for whom.

God to be regarded as a giver.

They are true, then, because God is Love, and one revelation of that love is in His character as a Giver. God is a free, and a full, and a cheerful Giver. In temporal things and in spiritual, out of full hands and an inexhaustible heart, He pours out on the Church of His Son showers of blessing. *The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof.* And if evidence of this bountifulness is asked for, evidence patent to the senses, and sufficient to compel consent from the most grudging and sceptical hearts, ought we not to see, even in the glories of the inanimate creation, as well as in the prodigality of kindness wherewith the Maker of all things has bestowed on mere animal life provision, not only for existence, but even for enjoyment; that God, in making this fair world, made it

Psalm xxiv. 1.

for brightness and joy; and that *the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain* through the interruption of the Divine purpose by man's sin? Let us never suppose that God cares only for the soul, and not also for the body; that the temporal needs of His redeemed people are a matter of indifference to Him; that the maintenance of a labouring man can be beneath His notice who sent His own Son to work as a carpenter, or that a little child's happiness is uncared for by that eternal Father who has looked on His Christ as a helpless infant slumbering in a human mother's arms. God cares for everything that can affect His people; and if not a sparrow falls to the ground without Him, then not the meanest slave that cries up to Him from the ends of the earth, not the most ragged child that honours His name, in the lowest London alley, is unseen by Him who redeemed all the world, because He loved it all, and who has His own hidden ways of blessedly compensating the sorrows which He does not interpose to prevent, but which He is ever willing to sanctify and to heal.

Rom. viii. 22.

But if God's character as a Giver is manifested continually in matters of the body, equally so is it in things of the soul. When He gave His Son He gave all He had to give, for He gave Himself. Jesus on the manger, on the cross, in the grave, is the sufficient proof of the infinite love of God. There is grace enough, and to spare, for all who need it, since the intercession of Christ means the gift of the Spirit; and He who spared Christ not only to be our victim, but our example, not only to be a righteousness for us, but a life within us, He, let us be sure, desires, far more than we do, to conform us to the image of His Son, and will *with Him also freely give us all things.*

Rom. viii. 32.

How this is true.

F we ask how all this is true, the answer is, that Christ's fulness is for His people, and that through and according to the life and measure of their union and fellowship with Him, do they receive of that fulness, and *grace for grace. All things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and*

John i. 16.

1 Cor. iii. 21–23.

ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's. Life is the Christian's in a far higher and fuller sense than it is the worldly man's, since he enjoys it on a far higher level of blessedness, and uses it in a much nobler cause. Even death is his, since, though for a moment it triumphs over him, in the end he triumphs over it, and, while he seems to yield to it, he treads it under his feet. For it is the portal to life; and while our friends are weeping at our bedside, a chorus of angels welcomes us into Paradise. What the world dreads, the believer at last welcomes, for it severs us from sin, and takes us to the vision of God.

If (to proceed to the fuller exposition of this somewhat startling paradox) we ask when it is true—only in the life to come, or also in the present life, we answer, Now, to-day, down here on earth; and if the answer a little staggers us, and we inquire how it is possible to reconcile such a statement with the histories in Holy Scripture, with the personal experience of sincere Christians, with the needful chastisement

And when.

that comes to all in turn, the answer is, It may not, it cannot always be *felt* to be true, but that does not therefore make it cease to be true; in moments of exhaustion and depression, the strongest faith may doubt, the stoutest courage murmur. When the thorn in the flesh grieved him, even a St Paul besought the Lord thrice that it might be taken away; and the psalmist, whose very words we are this moment considering, has left on record how, in his "distress," he cried unto the Lord, and He heard him. Yet at the end of life, the review of it ever calls up from a Christian's lips, poor and afflicted though he may have been, a living and loud expression of wondering thankfulness. The same St Paul could afterwards write from his prison cell at Rome: *I have all, and abound.* Humility and faith are twin sisters. Even in life itself, amidst its labours and trials, and losses and sorrows, the believing soul continually rejoices to rest in the Lord's goodness, takes what is given it, and is still.

Phil. iv. 18.

Actual facts may indeed prevent our saying

we have always everything we wish for at the moment we ask for it. Our nature has many needs and desires; and so long as some of them are unsatisfied, as some of them in the nature of things always must be, there will so far be a tendency in us to dissatisfaction and unrest. When, for instance, God deprives us of some valued friend, or some precious gift, He means us to feel the loss; and maybe all through life we shall continue to feel it, just as an old wound, long after it has healed over, is wont to remind us that it is there. Therefore when we speak of Christ being all-sufficient, and indeed in any use of the words we point to an ideal standard very high above us, we do not mean that He will be or can be to us in all respects precisely what the friend was whose loss we mourn. What we do mean is partly that He will strengthen us to endure our loss bravely: partly that He will fill more completely with His own presence that part of us which He claims as His own.

Once more, while it is true for all, whether they know it and care for it or not, yet the *And for whom.*

truth of it comes home as an actual and blessed fact only to true believers; and to them, just according to the simplicity of their faith, and the amount of their capacity, and the measure of their obedience, and the devoutness of their love. We are none of us quite always the same, and then there are all possible varieties of faith and patience among the real children of God; and it is not every one who can sincerely say, just at the moment of his loss, *The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.* Yet as the opened eyes of Elisha's servant saw the mountain round about Dothan full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha, so the eye of a mighty faith can discern the Divine Presence and rest in it, while others are conscious only of a thick darkness, and God seems lost out of His world. For it is faith, and nothing else, that can give the victory over the sharpness of pain, and the desolateness of bereavement, and the humiliation of sickness, and the necessities of poverty; and while one man cries out, *All these things are against me,*

Job i. 21.

Gen. xlii. 36.

another is able even to *take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.* 2 Cor. xii. 10.

According to the capacity of receiving.

SOME Christians, again, have far more power of receiving than others; and, while into some hearts the Divine grace can only distil itself slowly, and drop by drop, others so thirst for the living water, that God can rain it down on them in abundant showers. *Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it,* is an inspired sentence, which not only indicates the bountifulness of God, but also the responsibility of man. If through our earthliness, or our indevoutness, or our indulgence of sin, or our littleness and shallowness of soul, we cannot hold much of the Divine fulness, and so, in times of long watching and severe trial, our lamps seem going out, let us not find fault with the apparent niggardliness of the Divine giver; rather let us ask to be taught how to offer the prayer, *Deal bountifully with Thy servant, O Lord, that I may live, and keep Thy word.* Psalm lxxxi. 10. Psalm cxix. 17.

Safeguard against murmuring.

A habit of ready, exact, and conscientious obedience is an excellent preservative against a spirit of murmuring. An obedient soul can be trusted with much more prosperity than a disobedient or self-indulgent one; and though this remark must instantly be qualified by the warning not to presume to interpret our neighbour's outward circumstances by his inner life before God; though, in some cases, as has been elsewhere noticed,* the very highest honour that a Holy God can put upon us is to choose us out from the crowd to learn *the fellowship of Christ's sufferings;* it is also true to say, that few of us are aware how we mar our own happiness, and, so to speak, put it out of God's power to prosper us, as otherwise He might be willing to do, through our abusing this world instead of using it, through our turning the gifts of His kindness into mere occasions of falling. God loves us far too well and too wisely to give us what we should only turn to our hurt. When we have eaten and are full, our heart is too often lifted up, and we forget the Lord

Phil. iii. 10.

* See p. 52.

our God, who led us in the wilderness; and we say in our heart, *My power, and the might of my hand hath gotten me this wealth.* Deut. viii. 17.

Once more, it is according to our love that we turn God's dealings with us into health and blessing; for *all things work together for good to them that love* Him. God's gifts are good, but He himself is better. *A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.* Rom. viii. 28. Luke xii. 15. It is not so much in the enjoyment of outward prosperity, nor in the possession of earthly blessings, nor in the praise of men, whether of the Church or the world, that our true wealth, or strength, or honour can chiefly lie. Rather these are in a heart purified from sin, lifted above the world, calm and humble in fellowship with God in Christ, recognising love in all the Divine dealings, and welcoming His will as ever wise, kind, and true.

Distinction between peace and happiness.

Professor Caird, in one of his most suggestive theological fragments, has pointed out the important distinction between peace and happiness; and has explained how the worldly man may have happiness without

peace, and the Christian man peace without happiness. Now, this is a truth which has a very close bearing on the subject before us. Happiness is often the result of mere characteristic buoyancy, of vigorous bodily health, of material prosperity, in company either with the enthusiasm of youth or the ardent activities of manhood; and, while the utter absence of any deeper and more elevated feelings tends to make this happiness brighter, and heartier, it is, nevertheless, the happiness of only the surface of our nature, perfectly compatible with irreligion, or viciousness, or selfishness, or vanity—subject at any moment to be terribly and hopelessly interrupted, and with nothing to fall back upon but the misery of its recollections.

Whereas peace is independent of the changes and chances of life, and can no more be disturbed, by what men call misfortune, in its lofty dominion over the inmost spirit, than the depths of the ocean can be stirred by the winter gales that beat its surface into foam. Not only is it the gift of God, but it is His very presence. Sickness cannot de-

stroy it; poverty cannot rob it of its incorruptible riches; bereavement only makes it more real, and the approach of death more deep. The world, which cannot give it, cannot take it away; its root is in the immovable assurance of the Divine acceptance and favour, through the blood and righteousness of the Saviour. It gradually spreads its roots over the entire spiritual being, through the sanctifying power of the eternal Spirit; and while the only thing that can ruffle it is the silent reproach of a wounded conscience, the only thing in all the world to destroy it is sin.

Thus, though we may not always be able to say we are happy—there are times when it would not only be unnatural, but even wrong to be happy, such as when a child is dying, or when God has taken from us our work, and made us sit still with folded hands and closed lips—we may still have peace. The Lord hath overcome death; and if we may not serve Him now, His purpose for us is that we may serve Him better presently. Christ still leaves His peace with us; still says to us, as to His disciples of old, *Let* John xiv. 27.

not your heart be troubled; neither let it be afraid.

On disappointments.

AND this brings us to consider, in the last place, the subject of disappointments, —an experience of life with which all are familiar, and which at first sight it is not quite so easy to explain, either as a merciful feature in the Divine government, or as consistent with the truth of the Divine sufficiency.

Varieties of them.

What varieties of disappointments meet us all in turn as we pass on through life! To begin with temporal things, the deepest, the saddest, the most abiding and inconsolable of all is disappointment in the affections, where the heart, surprised, it may be, into the discovery of its own aspirations, is, through the force of events, foiled, and thrown back upon itself, with, for years afterwards, the painful feeling of the plan of its life crossed, and its bright opportunity gone, may be, for ever. Roughly to scoff at this as mere sentimentalism is to ignore some of the most profound feelings of human nature under the cover of a sarcasm. Where men as well as

women are equally liable to, and are equally wounded by, the same disappointment, if it is an infirmity at all, it is at least one that human beings are born to. And to suppose that the Christian religion, the great glory and blessedness of which is, that it meets, and recognises, and covers every part of our nature only to educate, and elevate, and sanctify it, has no cure to offer for troubles of this kind; or that this one sorrow, which is capable of taking a far more complete hold of us than almost any other, is beneath the notice of Him who is the head of humanity, and the brother born for adversity,—is to bring a heavier charge against the completeness of our divine faith, than even its worst enemies could bring,—is to suppose that when Christ invited the weary and heavy laden to come to Him for rest, He all along meant to refuse to heal the broken in heart, and to bind up all their wounds.

Think again of a professional man who has diligently prepared himself for the exercise of his calling, and who is conscious (it need not be unduly) of powers and gifts which,

in obedience to a principle within him, he reasonably wishes to put out to use. But the opening does not come, the advancement is not offered, the place he feels to have earned does not turn up, and he lingers on in obscurity and poverty, with a keen sense of disappointment gnawing at his heart, and all spirit and energy dying out within him.

Or a child is anxiously longed for, under circumstances, it may be, that would make it a great joy and blessing: as when an heir is needed to carry on a name, and inherit a property; or where the father is dead, and the widowed survivor looks for the promised treasure as the one thing life will be worth living for, a holy trust to be cherished and fulfilled for God. It comes, and oh how the grateful heart blesses a kind God for His goodness! But after staying just long enough to let its mother discover its exceeding preciousness, or make its father's heart proud with joy, it returns to the God who gave it, and the solitude that was filled for a moment is more solitary, more desolate than before.

So too in spiritual things, how often we seem to pray for some grace or disposition, of which, to our shame and sorrow, we deeply feel to be in need; yet the prayer does not seem answered, while still the grace is denied.

Or our labours for the spiritual welfare of others meet with but poor success. We preach, and no man regards us. We invite, but no man follows us. We rebuke, but no man heeds us. We teach and warn, and plead, but the seed seems always to fall on stony ground. The language of our heart is with the prophet of old, *I have laboured in vain.* Isaiah xlix. 4. The experience of our failure is precisely that of the apostles on the sea of Galilee, *We have toiled all the night, and taken nothing.* Luke v. 5. Nay, perhaps, the one soul that we have specially cared for, watched over, and prayed about, is more resolute than any other in resisting the offers of salvation, is more indifferent than any other to the love *which passeth knowledge.* Eph. iii. 19.

Now the first thing I would observe about

Disappointments occur to all in turn.

about these various disappointments is, that they occur to us all in turn; no temptation, in this respect, can take us but such as is familiar to every one. This human life brings equal risks, inflicts equal cares. The Bible is full of disappointments both in matters of this life, and of the life to come.

How hard it must have seemed to Jacob, not only to be disappointed of Rachel, but also to be defrauded of his fair wages and advancement, is evident from his own words. *In the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night; and my sleep departed from mine eyes. Thus have I been twenty years in thy house: I have served thee fourteen years for thy two daughters, and six years for thy cattle, and thou hast changed my wages ten times. Except the God of my fathers, the God of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely thou hadst sent me away now empty.*

Gen. xxxi. 40–42.

Then it must have been severely mortifying for David not to build the temple; yet he was only permitted to collect the

materials. It really seems to be God's law never to suffer any one man to do all a work. *One soweth, and another reapeth.* John iv. 37. This man finishes what that man began.

Again, how in the first months of his imprisonment the eager spirit of St Paul must have been tempted to chafe and fret, interrupted in his journey to Rome, baffled at the very moment when the whole world seemed opening for the gospel, his enemies free to do all the harm they could, and he, in the prime of his life, and at the pinnacle of his success, a prisoner in bonds.

Nay, we may go even further, and not shrinking from recognising in the perfection of our blessed Lord's human nature all our own liabilities to sorrow, we may, without the least irreverence, discover from more than one incident in the Gospels, how the Saviour was disappointed Himself.

When the rich ruler came to Him, full of sincerity and zealousness, Jesus, beholding him, loved him, and enjoined on him the carrying of the daily cross as the one condition of discipleship! As the young

Luke xviii. 24. man went away sorrowful, do not the words of the Lord indicate a deep mournfulness over the soul that would not be saved? When, after the transfiguration, He was met by the mortifying failure of the disciples to cast out the evil spirit, His words of pained surprise testify to Luke ix. 41. the disappointment: *O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you, and suffer you?* Once more, when, in His agony, His human soul needed human sympathy, and He came to the apostle, who but an hour before had promised to die for Him, only to find him sleeping, His troubled soul relieved itself Mark xiv. 37. in the sad exclamation, *Simon, sleepest thou? couldest not thou watch one hour?*

The lessons they are to teach us.

AS to the lessons that our disappointments are meant to teach us, and the temper and spirit in which we should endeavour to meet them, it may be useful to offer a few grave words. First, our *Humility.* disappointments are to teach us humility. There are a great many persons in the

world more able, more skilful, more educated, more experienced than we are; and if these men are served first, and promoted first, so much the better for society, if so much the worse for us. It is but common sense in those who have places to give away to find the best possible instruments for filling them. It is but common fairness in us to acknowledge the merit that is superior to our own. Many of us, especially if we go by what our wives, and sisters, and mothers say of us, are apt to think far too well of ourselves, and the most wholesome, because the most effectual cure to this self-conceit, is when we discover by painful experience that we are not so much wanted, nor so highly thought of as we fancied we were; and that if we are superior to a few, we are inferior to many. The world soon forgets those whom it ceases to use, and the man who is laid on a shelf, and finds no one coming to hurry him to get down from it, or who is not promoted quite so rapidly as he wishes to be, will do well to mingle with his too hasty reproaches of the forgetfulness of

his friends a little wholesome self-examination on his own short-comings.

Patience. Then our disappointments should teach us patience. We are all of us in far too great a hurry to snatch at what we wish for, instead of waiting quietly, till it comes to us in God's good time. Let the fruit ripen before we gather it. Let us cheerfully leave our affairs in the Lord's hands. In our ignorance of the future, let us beware of acting as if we could look right into it. Let us remember the old proverb, that the man who can wait, lives to win the world.

Psalm xxviii. 16 (Prayer-book version.) *Tarry thou the Lord's leisure. Be strong, and He shall comfort thine heart, and put thou thy trust in the Lord.*

Self-improvement. Disappointment, again, should stir us up to self-improvement, should make us ask ourselves, with the unsparing candour that it is so natural to apply to our neighbour's qualifications, how far we are actually fitted for the place or calling to which we aspire. Every sensible man will acknowledge that to be filling a post for which he is incompetent, is a pain and a disgrace. Every

conscientious man, simply desiring to serve God where and how he can best serve Him, will pause before he snatches from another man, well qualified to fill it, the place in which he himself could display nothing but his own inferiority. And every humble man, knowing what he cannot do, as well as what he can, will hasten to qualify himself both to discharge efficiently the duties that are likely to be offered him, and to earn fairly the reward that he may expect to receive.

Sympathy.

There is yet one other lesson to learn from our disappointments—a lesson in which the young and the prosperous are commonly so deficient—that of kindly sympathy with others under a like trial. The world is full of disappointed men and women, whom a little kindness has a wonderful power to soothe and rouse; and it is no slight compensation for our own mortifications if they have in some degree enabled us to calm a vexed temper, to quiet a ruffled heart, to rouse from a sullen, perhaps a growing, apathy the crushed energies that have no

more courage to work, and with cheerful words of manly sense and Christian exhortation to stir and animate the depressed heart that, seeing every one prospered in turn, except itself, interprets the neglect of man as the injustice of God.

The right spirit in which to bear disappointments.

LASTLY, let me add something on the spirit in which we should face our disappointments, and turn their apparent evil into positive and lasting good. And there are two kinds of helps; those which belong chiefly to our moral nature, and which we are to recognise and improve to the utmost of our power as planted in us by the wisdom of God; those again, which belong rather to our new and spiritual nature, the aids and graces of the Divine Comforter, by which we are conformed to Christ, and reconciled to the Father's will.

Self-respect.

First, then, let me say, that a man's personal dignity and sense of self-respect should be sufficient to prevent him from running about the world to proclaim his slights and injuries; should induce him to maintain a

calm and prudent reserve about the supposed neglect and injustice, which, if too much trumpeted about and dwelt upon, will soon make shrewd people suspect, that the merits, which have been so universally ignored, may have had no real existence at all. A certain amount of self-consciousness, whether of ability, or experience, or usefulness, or general desert, is neither inconsistent with proper modesty, nor probably with the discriminating judgment of the world at large. Any man who has conducted himself in life with respectability of character, and a fair amount of professional success, is quite justified in the feeling, that if he wishes society to help him, he too can help society. The world is just as much in need of fit men to fill its posts, as fit men can be of posts to fill. There is not so much merit at large, that it need long go a begging for an opportunity to employ itself. Wait a little, and the world, at whose door you have refused to knock, from a feeling of self-respect, will presently come to knock at your door to offer you the post it thinks you qualified for. "The stone

that is fit for the wall is never left in the road."

Justice to others.

Another feature of mind in which we should encounter disappointment is an impartial justice towards the claims or merits of those who have been appointed to the posts we also wished for, but which only one of us could obtain. No fair or good man will feel more than a momentary sense of disappointment at being beaten by his superior. It is injustice that stings; and if our sense of equity is satisfied, the vexation itself is soon forgotten. Now life is so vast, and the claims of business so incessant, and the world so large, and competition so enormous, that every appointment at all worth having instantly brings up to the surface a considerable number of sufficiently qualified candidates: and while each knows most about his own merits, He who rules the world knows everything about them all. When we succeed, we think it a mean feeling in our neighbour to grudge us our success; when we fail, let us say "God speed" to him, and mean it. If mere favouritism has baulked us, there is

nothing to be done but to bear it manfully; if all is fair and right, it is a consolation to be beaten in the race by the man who has run best in it, or at least, equally well with ourselves.

Single-mindedness.

Again, in all these things let us try to be actuated by the far too rare feeling of single-mindedness for the general welfare; in St Paul's language, let us *look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.* Circumstances are, no doubt, much complicated by the imperious considerations of health, means, family, and personal qualifications. Of course, all these things must be duly weighed, and allowed their fair share in any decision that is come to; only they must not be allowed to have *more* than their fair share, as they too often have. Surely the first thing a conscientious man ought to try to satisfy himself about in deciding on a place to live in, or a post to fulfil, is not, Is this the place where I can be most comfortable, or where my services will be best remunerated, or where there will be more ease and less work? but, Is this the place where I can best

Phil. ii. 4.

glorify my Master, and use the gifts that He has intrusted to my keeping, and where, in the day that He comes to take account of His servants, I shall feel thankful to have been willing to be? Seeking first His kingdom and righteousuess, I shall have all other things added to me; but if I put myself first and His kingdom second, if I postpone His glory and His work to my own personal and temporal interests, I may find to my sorrow ten years hence, that I have been succumbing to temptation instead of walking in the path divinely offered to me, and that instead of obeying my Master, I have been gratifying myself.

Spiritual helps. But there are also spiritual helps for this great conflict with self and pride,—the joy of faith, the patience of hope, and the comfort of love.

Faith. First, the *joy of faith*, that most elevating and ennobling of all human virtues and Divine graces, whereby Job was enabled to say at the crisis of his overwhelming troubles,

Job xiii. 15. *Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him;*

Hab. iii. 17, 18. whereby Habakkuk could say, *Although the*

fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation. Faith strengthens us, because it lays hold of the power of God, and makes it our very own. Faith ennobles us, for it brings Christ to dwell in our hearts, thereby making us to entertain Him, and Him to entertain us. One glimpse of His glory in an instant puts the world under our feet. One throb of the love that passeth knowledge makes us hot with shame, that we could ever doubt Him for a moment. Faith gladdens us, for it lifts us up above the clouds into the sunshine, it transports us from a world of shadows into the world of realities. From men, who think they rule the world, it takes us to God, who really rules it. We doubt no longer, we murmur no longer, when we see the Lord in His Holy Place sitting above the water-floods, the Head of His Church, the Shepherd of His Flock, the King for ever.

Hope. But because we believe, we hope; because we trust, we wait; and the joy of faith enables us for the *patience of hope.* Monod has said, that man is a creature with a heart to give away. An equally just definition might describe him as a creature who is always wishing for something, and hoping to attain it. We are *saved by hope;* and if faith makes us glad, hope makes us patient. As the husbandman waiteth for the latter rain, and the hireling for the shadows, and he that is in misery for death, and all creation for the manifestion of the sons of God, so the Christian, not less man because Christian, waits quietly, hopes cheerfully for the goodness of God. He trusts God's wisdom, that He will choose wisely; and His love, that He will bestow bountifully; and His righteousness, that He will distribute justly. If it is your turn to-day, it will be mine to-morrow. The earth is the Lord's; and the exact spot on it that He has chosen for each of His people, He will surely give in His own good time. For there is something in store for all of us, much better, and fitter, and

Rom. viii. 24.

richer than we could ever have chosen for ourselves; and He, who looks down on us from a far higher elevation than we can, who knows what each can do, and what each would be happy with, far more exactly than any one else, weighs in most accurate balances, the merits and capabilities of all His servants, and in the fulness of time sends us where He means us to be.

"Thou cam'st not to thy place by accident,
It is the very place God meant for thee;
And shouldst thou there small scope for action see,
Do not for this give room to discontent." *

And there is the *comfort of love*. All of us now and then are apt to be discontented, and morbid, and fretful; and because we do not get what we want the moment we want it, we murmur at man, and so complain of God. Possibly, however, there may be a purpose of mercy deep in God's heart towards us, in thus teaching us not to look for our help and consolation from any earthly instrument, however true in friendship, wise in counsel, strong in influence, or loving in

Love.

* Trench.

nature. THE LORD *is my Shepherd, therefore can I lack nothing.* Really to feel God's love to us, and our love to Him is the very highest blessedness of which the human soul is capable. There is a lavishness in all true love, which only those who truly love can understand. And when God loves us, His heart goes out towards us, and with His heart all that He can bestow. All the resources of His power, all the counsels of His wisdom, all the preciousness of His promises, all the gifts of His Spirit, are at our disposal, if only our hearts are open to receive them in the day of His power. To know and believe the love God hath to us—here, in a single sentence, is the beginning of Christian life, the history of Christian experience, the fulness of Christian joy. That God should love me, and yet refuse me anything for my good, is as utterly impossible as that He should cease to be God. To suppose that Christ can have suffered for me, and yet while laying on me His cross deny me the needful grace to carry it after Him; sooner than think this, let us boldly say at once, that He has died in vain!

VI.

ETERNAL LIFE.

VI.

ETERNAL LIFE.

"SURELY GOODNESS AND MERCY SHALL FOLLOW ME ALL THE DAYS OF MY LIFE; AND I WILL DWELL IN THE HOUSE OF THE LORD FOR EVER."

> "*Le Chrétien éclairé sur la résurrection de notre Sauveur jouit de l'assurance de son salut; il en est aussi sûr, qu'il est sûr que Jésus Christ est ressuscité: et pour le faire douter de son espérance éternelle, il faudrait commencer par le faire douter que Jésus Christ est ressuscité des morts.*"—ADOLPHE MONOD.

Thankfulness.

THANKFULNESS is one of the most attractive qualities of the Christian character. While it invigorates and animates ourselves, it glorifies God, and it edifies our neighbour. No doubt it has much to do with natural temperament, sound health, sufficient means, and congenial employment. Nevertheless, it is sometimes perfectly independent of

these accidental causes; and he who in poverty, or sickness, or solitude, can preserve a merry heart and a cheerful countenance is a benefactor to society, a testimony to his God, and the best of all possible friends to himself.

But if thankfulness is an attractive quality of the Christian character, it ought also, within certain limits and with certain exceptions to be a universal one. Clouds will sometimes prevent our seeing the sunshine; and every one now and then is tempted to
Psalm xlii. 6. exclaim, out of a depressed heart, *O my God, my soul is cast down within me.* Still it may be safely asserted that the prevailing temper of a truly Christian mind is a lively sense of the Divine goodness; and at the end of life, as the departing pilgrim looks back on the way by which the Lord his God has led him through the wilderness, the one exclamation of wondering gladness is, "How good God has been to me!" the one conviction of assured faith is, "He will never change. He will continue to love me to the end."

But why is this so? What is it that

throws this steady and sunny light both on past and on future—that eases burdens heavy enough to crush other men—that interprets all God's dealings, even the hardest and the darkest, under the unfailing purpose of eternal love? It is the blessed knowledge of what God has been, is, and will be, to us; it is the knowing in whom we have believed, and that He is able to keep that which we have committed unto Him against that day; it is the sanctifying presence of the Indwelling Comforter; in a word, it is the consciousness of possessing eternal life, through abiding in the Father and the Son.

Eternal life to be enjoyed now.

That we have eternal life now in a true, though of course limited, degree, can be proved from many passages of Scripture. There are our Lord's words, when, about the death of Lazarus, He said to Mary, *He that liveth and believeth in me shall never die;* and again, on the eve of His own passion, when, in prayer to His Father, He said, *This is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent.* There are St Paul's words,

John xi. 26.

John xvii. 3.

Col. iii. 1, 2. *Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.* There 1 John v. 12. are St John's words, *He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.* The believing soul, in the language of the same apostle, has already passed from death unto life through the power of the regenerating Spirit, though that life cannot be completed or enjoyed in the full fruition of its blessedness until, in the resurrection of the body, we enter on the entire and incorruptible immortality of our whole being.

No great ingenuity is required to trace, all through the twenty-third psalm, (nay, it might almost be said, through each separate verse of it,) some distinct truth about this eternal life. There is the *substance* of it in our personal spiritual union with the Lord Jesus. *The Lord is my Shepherd*, belonging to me, and I to Him; He dwelling in me, and I in Him. The *manifestation* of this life is in the personal holiness of the believer, whom the Good Shepherd ever strives to lead on into the green pastures and still waters of

an ever-riper knowledge and fuller image of Himself. Would we know how to ascertain if this eternal life is ours or not, the answer will not be found in sudden emotions of feeling, however animating they may be; nor in a clear and consistent theological system, blessed as it is for those who have attained it; nor in aptness of controversy, useful as it sometimes is in contending for the truth, nor in an unhealthy eagerness about means of grace, which, though they are channels of Christ's presence, are not Christ himself;—but in a life hidden with Christ in God, yet manifesting itself daily by a continual bringing forth of the fruits of the Spirit. The *discipline* of it is in the wisely alternating visitations of joy and sorrow according to the needs and circumstances of each individual soul.

For this eternal life extends its purifying and exalting influence over the entire being of man. It lays hold of his understanding, enabling it rightly to appreciate and humbly receive the great mysteries of the gospel, in the Father's eternal purpose, and in the atoning blood of the incarnate Son, and the

regenerating grace of the Spirit. It seizes the heart, and strikes its roots all down it and through it, engaging and occupying the affections for God himself, whose is the first and rightful claim. The conscience it purges *from dead works to serve the living God*, giving it rest and peace through the precious blood that can alone wash out sin. The will it subdues into captivity to God's will, not by taking it away, nor by immersing it in God's, as some mystics have delighted to say, but by training and educating it into a free and complete and cheerful and intelligent obedience. And while over the entire moral and spiritual being of man it sheds its blessed and increasing influence, it makes our very mortal bodies, through the operation of our wills and affections, servants and instruments of righteousness unto God.

Heb. ix. 14.

But what is the method of this? The shedding forth of the love of God into our hearts by the Holy Ghost. For observe the result in David's mind of this spirit of thankfulness, and the unfailing evidence of eternal life in the soul. It is devoutness. *I will*

Devoutness.

dwell in the house of the Lord for ever. God's goodness did not harden him into indifference, nor produce in him a sense of independence of God or of confidence in his own prosperity. Rather it made him feel more than ever his need of God, and that God was his only sufficient and abiding portion; that the nearer he could live to Him, the more often he could worship Him; the more he could hear of His truth and receive of His grace, the better it must be for him, both here and hereafter. Nor is this the solitary expression of his feeling, since again and again in his psalms—such as the 27th, the 42d, and the 84th—do we find the same.

Now, it is deeply important for us to inquire very seriously what are the chief aids to devoutness among Christian people, and how we may best remove the obstacles and hindrances to it wherever such are found to exist.

Meaning of devoutness.

THE meaning of devoutness is personal adoring filial love to God the Father, as revealed in His Son Jesus Christ.

It is not, in the usual acceptation of the word, the invariable accompaniment of living faith in the soul; for there are many sincere and excellent persons, walking in the fear of God and in the light of conscience, of whom to speak as devout would be to describe them inaccurately, if not altogether untruly. It is by no means always found in company with a great amount of accurate doctrinal knowledge; for it was when Mary Magdalene was weeping over her lost Lord, whom she thought to be stolen and could not believe to be risen, that her Saviour, recognising her devoutness, rewarded it by the revelation of Himself. It may be called the enthusiasm of personal religion, springing from a fervent and affectionate nature, going out after God, and cleaving to Him and delighting in Him, not so much for what He gives as for what He is; prizing above all His gifts the constant sense of His sanctifying presence, desiring above all His graces the power of loving Him more as He deserves. In David's own words, it is thirst for God, for the living God, the longing to go and appear before God;

it is also the deep unutterable adoration of a soul that throbs and burns with the very fire of heaven, the emotion of a heart that would multiply itself a hundredfold only to give all to Him.

"Jesus, the very thought of Thee
With sweetness fills the breast;
But sweeter far Thy face to see,
And in Thy presence rest.

"Tongue never spake, ear never heard,
Never from heart o'erflow'd
A dearer name, a sweeter word,
Than Jesus, Son of God."

Why devoutness is so rare.

If devoutness is rare, so much rarer than it ought to be, the reason is not hard to find. For we love our God with such a thin, feeble, meagre, circumspect love, not in the least because He denies us the power of loving Him, or refuses to pour into our heart His love to us; but partly because we do not sufficiently appreciate the duty and the blessedness of loving Him; partly because we hinder the outcoming of His love to us, and the upgoing of our love to Him, by sloth or sin; partly, also, because we do not fulfil the conditions, and use with such languor and indifference the aids and helps, by which

alone love to God can burn in the soul with a steady and bright flame.

If that considerable number of professing Christians who are continually lamenting their want of love to Christ and God, would really and thoroughly search their hearts about it, some of them might discover, that they have already as much of God's love as they have any right to expect; and that the amount which they feel to possess, whether of a sense of His love to them, or theirs to Him, is, as a matter of fact, in exact proportion to their real efforts after it. *To be safe,* is practically the end and aim with which tens of thousands of professing Christians sit down in an ignoble contentedness. Not to be punished for sin, not to be shut out of heaven, not to be refused the comfortable persuasion of peace with God, not to be left knocking at the door of God's mercy uncertain if we shall ever be let in:—this is what too many people look upon as the goal of the Christian's race, and the substance of his assurance, and the reward

of his faith, and the pledge of his victory. Whereas it is but the starting-point, and not the conclusion; the earnest, but not the fulfilment, of his salvation. To be delivered from sin, in the love and power of it, is really of far more importance, both for God and us, than that we should be set free from the fear of hell, essential as that is to the liberty and cheerfulness of our service; and to be made fit for heaven, is the only possible condition on which we could enjoy its blessedness, or mix in its society, or do its works, or adore its Lord. It is no doubt a most blessed thing to feel safe; yet certainly it is neither the loftiest nor the most elevating sentiment even of human nature: and to rest content with our sense of safety, comparatively indifferent to the glory or the kingdom of Him who has saved us, is to fall very short indeed of our Redeemer's purpose for us, is to know nothing of the spirit of the apostle, whose one constraining motive, both of gratitude and obedience, was love to Him who died and rose again.

The standard of Christians too low.

So many of us have such a miserably low standard! We hardly care for God's love, except for the mental excitement of feeling it. We hardly care for His glory, except just so far as our personal instrumentality is concerned in advancing it. We hardly care for His presence, save when no other consolations are forthcoming. Nine out of every ten human beings are naturally disposed to be intensely idle; and this idleness creeps over the renewed nature, and lulls it into drowsiness and sloth. We are often too idle for the effort of sustained prayer. We are often too idle, steadily and thoughtfully, to study our Bibles. We are often too idle to interest ourselves in bearing the burdens or healing the sorrows of those around us. We are often too idle for anything much more than listening to rousing sermons, and occasionally attending a meeting for missions, and —being "scarcely saved." Unbelief is at the root of it. If we really believed that God, of, and by, and in Himself, could make us happy; if we could learn to trust

Him, and be content with Him, apart from His gifts, in the deep conviction that He is more and better than them all; if, in our jealousy for His honour, and in our appreciation of His character, and in our sympathy with His purposes, and in our gratitude for His cross, we could come to have more of His mind about sin, more to understand His intense hatred and horror of it, more, with Him, to pity and yearn over the lost, more to perceive and know that the very greatest loss a human being can suffer is the loss of His image and presence, I do think we should more cheerfully and readily cast ourselves into His arms, and yield ourselves to His purposes; we should say more continually, more fervently, more honestly, than most of us can say now, "Do what Thou wilt with me, only love me: and give me the power of loving Thee in return!"

Conditions of devoutness.

THE conditions of devoutness are few, obvious, and simple. First, if God is to come to fill the heart with His sweetness and His glory, He must have it all to Himself when He comes. By which I do not mean that He is jealous of the rightful and natural love, which we give to, and claim from, each other. *He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?* Love to man is often the shortest road to the love of God. Nor again, that He expects or demands perfection while we are here. But He does expect, and we must give Him, sincerity of purpose in seeking Him, resoluteness of will in following Him, perseverance of effort in surrendering to Him all we have, and all we are. Half-heartedness in religion is the true secret of the want of zeal and power in the Church of Christ; and the famous French sarcasm is sometimes almost as true of sincere, as of merely nominal, Christians, "that they have just religion enough to make them miserable, but not enough to make them happy."

Entire self-surrender.

1 John iv. 20.

Another absolutely essential condition of devoutness is the entire, and unsparing, and incessant conflict with indwelling sin, however inveterate, or pleasant, or secret from men, or indulgently treated by the world. So long as we make a truce with any sin whatever, and choose to think about it, either that it is so small it does not signify, or so hidden that no one knows of it, or so powerful that we cannot overcome it, just so long are we with one side of our voice inviting God to come to us, and with the other side bidding Him keep away. God is a holy God; and if His servants can consent, knowingly and perseveringly, to nurse in their hearts such sins as covetousness or pride, or vanity or envy, or evil and censorious speaking, they must take the consequences. Divine grace has a marvellous vitality, and it takes a great deal of pains quite to extinguish it. Still it is easy enough to stunt its growth; and if we are not watchful over ourselves, instead of being epistles, to the church and the world, of God's Divine power, in using us as instruments of righteousness, we shall be epistles,

Mortification of sin.

equally well known and well read of the power of sin to quench and smother the Divine Spirit, and of the fatal certainty with which self-indulgence of any kind will, sooner or later, take its revenge on us.

Diligence for God.

Another condition of devoutness is active and continual occupation in the Lord's service. What exercise does for the body, usefulness does for the soul, in quickening the circulation through the entire system, and in giving a healthy play to the organs and faculties of our being. Such occupation may be confined to the four walls of a house. It is not essential to it that it should be prominent, or varied, or arduous, or, indeed, of any special sort or kind whatever. All that is necessary is, that each Christian person should feel himself a labourer in the Lord's vineyard, and should be doing with humility and cheerfulness the task the Lord gives him to do, whatever and wherever it may be. This alone (unless sickness or other cause of inability prevent it) can keep the heart awake, the will obedient, the mind ready, the conscience pure. If it involve

self-denial, so much the better. Nay, the chances are, that if there is no self-denial about it, we are pleasing ourselves, instead of pleasing Christ. Some people are so constituted, that they would find it harder to overcome natural diffidence in visiting the sick, or even in teaching a class of children, than to eat dry bread for a year. But to master self is the meaning of sanctification; and the sure and certain reward of following our Saviour wherever He leads us, is that we are thereby strengthened for the daily conflict with sloth and selfishness in our own hearts; and thus in ministering to others we are unconsciously benefiting ourselves.

Once more: it is absolutely impossible to maintain the heart in a condition of real devoutness without a steady and frequent use of those means of grace ordained and provided for us by a higher wisdom than our own, and to neglect which is both presumption and folly. *Use of the means of grace.*

FIRST and foremost of these is prayer, —secret, frequent, sustained, and fer- *Prayer.*

vent prayer,—prayer not only for the supply of needs, or for the sense of pardon, but for close spiritual communion with the Lord of our spirit, in at least an effort after that adoring and holy praise which is the substance of the worship in heaven. I know how hard prayer is almost at all times; how glad we sometimes feel to be able to say anything; that our best prayers ever fall short of our true aspirations; that our worst prayers are often so cold, so feeble, so poor, so wandering, they hardly deserve to be called prayers at all. And it is the humbling personal knowledge of the inadequacy and shortcomings of his own prayers, that may well make a Christian writer pause, before he raises a standard that he himself so very inadequately reaches unto, as well as shrink from making a heart sad, which God would not make sad, by inviting prayer, which to many would seem so distant and so impracticable, as only to reduce them to despair. Yet prayer is a habit; and the more we pray, the better we shall pray; and the highest mountain can

be climbed by steady, patient walking; and if we never set a mark before us, to aim at and try for, we may soon discover that nothing is so perilous to the soul's life as contentedly sitting still. Sometimes, to go to be alone with God and Christ in the fellowship of the Spirit, just for the joy and blessedness of it; to open, with reverent yet eager hands, the door into the presence chamber of the great King, and then to fall down before Him, it may be, in silent adoration; our very attitude an act of homage, our merely being there, through the motive that prompts it, being the testimony of our soul's love; to have our set day-hours of close communion, with which no other friends shall interfere, and which no other occupations may interrupt; to which we learn to look forward with a living gladness; on which we look back with satisfaction and peace; this indeed is prayer, for its own sake, for God's sake, for our friends' sake, for the Church's sake, for our work's sake; prayer which we do not hurry through, to still the conscience, but which (other things per-

mitting) we can even linger over to satisfy the heart. Oh, if we Christians, who talk so much about the privilege and blessedness of prayer, would try to avail ourselves of it more than we do, how we should reflect on the world all around us the glory, as it streams on us from the face of the incarnate Mediator! What a power we should become to rebuke sin, and proclaim pardon, and promise liberty, and offer peace, through our continually laying hold on the hem of the garment of our glorified Lord!

Study of the Bible.

There must also be a full and frequent study of God's holy Word. In Holy Scripture, as Christ Himself has said, we have eternal life. He is the Living Word of God: the Bible is the written word. There some persons who, without the special excuse of but little leisure, go so far as to say that the Bible is the only book that Christians ought to study, other books involving but a waste of time. It may be sufficient to reply, that to impose this as a duty on all men alike is certainly to go beyond the letter of Scripture itself; that

it is hardly consistent with the reasonable and justifiable cultivation of the various mental gifts and faculties with which God has endowed us, meaning us to use them, and that we are not particularly encouraged to it by any special largeness of mental vision or Christian charity in the few individuals who observe this rule themselves, It does not, however, follow that because the Bible is not the only book for Christians to study, that they might not study it much more than they do, and with much more pains, and diligence, and prayer. When we open our Bibles, quite as much as when we fall on our knees, we place ourselves in God's immediate presence; and we should read His Word both in the sense of listening to His voice, and with the object of discovering His will. It is quite impossible for any Christian whatever to grow in the love of God without growing in the knowledge of Him. Let any one who is doubtful about it read the Epistles of St Paul's first imprisonment, and his doubts will soon disappear. But how can we grow in the knowledge of

God without being much in the study of the Bible? For, first, it is the one object of the Bible to teach us the original and authoritative truth of God; and then we never appreciate truth so vividly, or receive it so gladly, or detain it so tenaciously, or impart it so intelligently, as when we have discovered it for ourselves by our own thought and effort. One hour's devotional study of Scripture will often do more than a dozen sermons to stir up in our hearts the love of God. There are many external proofs of the inspiration of the Bible. Christ's own teaching, the doctrine of His apostles, the tradition of the Jews, the universal consent of the Christian Church of all times, place the Divine authority of both Old and New Testaments on a foundation which cannot be moved. To let go the blessed truth of the plenary inspiration of Holy Scripture, is to lose the sheet anchor of Revelation, and to drift away towards the dark and restless sea of human speculation,

1 Tim. vi. 20. and *science, falsely so called.* But there is internal as well as external evidence of this inspiration: hundreds and thousands of simple

Christians, who know nothing of argument or controversy, have discovered, through the witness of God's Spirit in their own hearts, that the Bible is the very voice of God; and there is no argument half so efficacious with the great majority of readers, for proving the Divine authorship of Scripture, as the spiritual hallowing influence that the Bible itself seems to breathe over us when we bring ourselves into real contact with its contents.

Contemplation.

Again, a great help to devoutness in this restless and distracting age is contemplation. It may be distinguished from meditation (on which a few words have already been written,*) as being the attention of the mind and heart to a person rather than to a truth; and while meditation may be defined as the pondering of the spirit on some Divine doctrine, with (so to speak) closed eyes and abstracted senses, contemplation is the adoring gaze of the believing and worshipping heart on the glory of its Lord and King. "Out of sight, out of mind," is a truth true in many ways. If we never set

* See p. 158.

Christ Himself preaching on the mountains of Galilee, dying on the cross, glorified at His Father's right hand, before our heart and imagination, we must expect only faintly to realise all that He has suffered, all that He is now doing for us; and the result will be our spiritual loss. To look on Jesus with the purified eye of faith and love, though it may be a rare, is, however, a truly blessed mean of grace. There is a sense in which even now we may see, if we will, our King in His beauty; and if in the day of His return we are to be made like Him in body as well as in soul through seeing Him as He is, we may become spiritually like Him now through contemplating His person, and meditating on His work, and pondering His character, and feeding on His words. For, even now, *we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.*

2 Cor. iii. 18.

There is yet one other aid towards the stirring up within us of a living devoutness to Christ, on which a few words have elsewhere

been said,* from a different point of view, and that is, a frequent receiving of the Lord's Supper. Even in the lowest and poorest interpretation of this sacrament, as nothing more than an act of commemoration of the Lord's sacrifice, one would think that nothing would be so likely to stir our gratitude, and dispose our hearts to receive His mercy, as often to partake of the memorial of His passion; and that none of the Saviour's words would be more tenderly cherished, or more studiously obeyed, than His dying injunction, *This do in remembrance of me.* Luke xxii. 19. But the teaching of Zwinglius falls miserably short of the authorised doctrine, whether of the Church of England or the Church of Scotland. The English Church teaches her members that "if, with a true penitent heart and lively faith, we receive that holy sacrament, then we spiritually eat the flesh of Christ, and drink His blood, then we dwell in Christ, and Christ in us,—we are one with Christ, and Christ with us." The Church of Scotland, in the Shorter Catechism, declares

Frequent receiving of the Lord's Supper.

* See p. 171.

that the "worthy receivers" in this sacrament are "made partakers of Christ's body and blood, with all His benefits;" and in answer to the question, "Is not Christ really present in the Sacrament of the Supper?" does not hesitate distinctly to reply that, "He is as really, but spiritually present to the faith of believers in that ordinance, as the elements themselves are to their outward senses."

Now if this indeed be so—if, whenever we partake of the Lord's table, in a right spirit—we feed on the very Christ Himself, given to us there by the operation of His Spirit, to be our meat and drink, our strength and joy, must not that blessed mean of grace be especially calculated to fill us with thankfulness and self-abasement, to stir up renewed self-surrender, and more habitual self-denial? And as to the objection, so frequently, and not at all unreasonably, made to a frequent reception of it, on the ground of our losing blessing through a greater familiarity with it, may we not thereby be doubting, though quite uncon-

sciously, God's wisdom in ordaining this privilege, and mistrusting His power to prevent His ordinance falling short of His purpose to bless? Of course, it must always be a matter for individual discretion how often it may be expedient to partake of this ordinance; and while we are careful to reserve to ourselves the free exercise of our own judgment, the same liberty must be granted to our brethren. Still, it is certain that from not fully appreciating the blessedness, and apprehending the meaning, and using the opportunities, and welcoming the grace of this sacrament, some of us fall short of God's offers of blessing; for, while it strengthens faith, and quickens love, it also animates hope. The memorial of the Cross is also the promise of the glory; and they who at the Lord's table on earth love to show forth their *Lord's death till He come,* 1 Cor. xi. 26. are surely more likely than others to be looking forward to the glorious moment when they will be called to sit down to the marriage Supper of the Lamb.

Eternal life in Heaven.

NOW, all this throws light on the eternal life in heaven, which we come to consider in the latter part of the verse, *I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.* Whether David himself actually meant to refer to it, is open to reasonable doubt. Certain, however, it is that he had been divinely instructed about it, and some of the most beautiful of his psalms anticipate its blessedness in language which Christians, looking back at their Lord's resurrection, can gladly and consistently use. But it is one of the features of the inspired Word, that it contains depth within depth of the Divine doctrine, well beneath well of the living water; and it is hardly possible for a Christian to utter these words without declaring the *blessed hope* of *the glorious appearing* to be his own.

Psalm xxiii. 6.

Titus ii. 13.

Heaven is spoken of here under three points of view,—as a home, as a permanent home, as a home in the presence of God. It is to be a house, not a tent; a home, not a lodging; the no longer seeing through a glass

darkly, but the beholding as with open face the vision of God.

It is a continuation of eternal life on earth.

Now, eternal life in heaven is plainly but a continuation and a development of eternal life on earth. It will be the same in the essence of its character, in the motive of its service, in the substance of its joys, in the nature of its glory. It will be different, for there will be no mortal body to hamper its action, no sinful nature to interrupt its progress; in perfect liberty, and in entire security, with energies that will never be exhausted, with opportunities that will never be thrown away, it will expand in the glorified soul through the eternal ages, to the praise of God and the joy of men.

Love will be its character.

The character of heaven will be the perfect unalloyed love of sinless and glorified beings. Dwelling in love, we shall, in the full sense of the word, dwell in God, and God in us. The noblest aspirations of the regenerate man will then have their full satisfaction; and if there will still be something left to wish for, if in the fulness

of joy at God's right hand, faith and hope shall still hold their place, and fulfil their functions in the human soul, faith will be the joyful and humble sense of dependence on God and Christ, Who there as here will be the spiritual food, the source of life and power to His glorified creatures, hope will vividly anticipate an ever-increasing capacity to love God as He deserves, ever-growing powers to prove and use that love in obedience to the Divine will. At present it is almost impossible to conceive ourselves loving God and each other perfectly; to have every motive of service, every spring of feeling, every throb of zeal rooted and grounded in love, which self shall not spoil, and pride shall not tarnish. In heaven, dwelling in an atmosphere of love, to which each contributes, and of which each receives, we shall behold Him, who is the sun from whom our light comes, the King from whom our royalty comes, the Priest who gives us our priesthood, the Lamb who has bought us our salvation; and the more

we gaze the more we shall love: and our growth in love will be as infinite as God.

For we cannot do more than love God; there is no higher duty, and there is no greater bliss. The true idea of the character of heaven must be that of love; the only question about it is the question of degree. God is love Himself: and so far as we resemble Him, we shall be love likewise: and as if to show that love is worship and worship is love, the inspired account of heaven is, that there shall be no temple there. Perfect love can adore and worship without signs and symbols; *the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it.* Rev. xxi. 22.

The service in Heaven.

LOVE being the character, nay, the very nature of heaven, it is clear that the service and occupation of heaven will be the simple outgoing and satisfying of that love, in whatever can serve, and please, and glorify Him on whom it is bestowed. To know God's will, must then be instantly and joyfully to fulfil it; and independently of the new means, that may then be vouchsafed, of

spiritual fellowship, and of Divine communications, (about which none of us can do more than guess and speculate,) we are quite sure that there will be no moral hindrance, as there too often is now, to ascertaining it, through our own unwillingness to perform it when known; by intuition we shall discover His good pleasure; and by the unerring instinct of our nature we shall hasten to fulfil it. For there will be no law in heaven. Law, as St Paul tells us, is only for *the lawless and disobedient.* When it is our meat and drink to do God's will, we shall stand in no more need of a code from Sinai. Walking in the spirit, we shall be delivered from the letter. When the blessed will of God is written in our hearts, and absorbed into our wills, and apparent to our minds, and supreme in our consciences, we shall not want teachers to teach us, *for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest;* and pains and penalties will be needed no longer, when perfect love has cast out fear.

1 Tim. i. 6.

Heb. viii. 11.

What that service will be, we can only conjecture, we may not presume to declare.

But death, so far as we know, cannot interrupt our spiritual existence, and will certainly be unable to affect either our mental powers or our constitutional gifts, or our moral character. Nay, it is not even conceivable, that the capacities we possess here, with so much to hamper their exercise, and mar their improvement, and check their progress, and disappoint their efforts, should be either suspended or diminished merely through our entrance into another state of being, which may be reasonably likened to a man's entering on mature life after the discipline and pupilage of school. We are justified, therefore, in thinking it at least probable that our service in heaven may not be altogether unconnected with our employments on earth; and that the powers and qualities, and gifts and talents intrusted to us here, will, according to the use and improvement we have made of them, decide our work and position for us in the kingdom of the Father.

For it is by no means of so much consequence what a man does as how he does it. His calling does not so much ennoble him,

as he his calling. Accuracy, perseverance, conscientiousness, patience, industry, are all immortal and invaluable properties of human character; and when the King comes to take account of His servants, each faithful servant's character and powers will at the end of his earthly career come up to judgment, not for condemnation, but for scrutiny; not only in reference to the past, but also to the future. Surely it is a noble and elevating reflection; one, moreover, to give much consolation and light about many otherwise unintelligible circumstances in the providential government of God, that nothing we do or suffer now that pleases God can be lost, or go unrewarded and forgotten.

1 Cor. iii. 8. *Every man shall receive his own reward, according to his own labour.* Humble diligence, uncomplaining patience, cheerful self-denial, unworldly simplicity, are seen of God, if neglected by men; and though in this world the man who takes most care of himself generally gets the best of it; in the next world, he who has thought most of God and his brother will then be found

the truly wise man; and in the day when God makes up His jewels to set in His Son's diadem, not necessarily those who have filled the highest places, or won the most applause, shall shine forth then with the most resplendent brightness, but those also shall be very near the throne who have postponed the praise of men to the praise of God, who have been contented to do modest duties well, rather than important duties badly; whose courage has kept them poor, and whom plain-spoken honesty has deprived of advancement; who have never suffered any earthly motive to blind their eyes to the seeking of God's glory, or to blunt their hearts to the sense of his love. There will be many widows with their two mites set high up in the heavenly places; and many Demases only just let in. It will be seen then to have been better to have had only one pound to use, and to have made two of it, than to have had five, and thrown them away.

"Be sure—no earnest work
Of any honest creature, howbeit weak,
Imperfect, ill-adapted, fails so much,
It is not gather'd as a grain of sand,

To enlarge the sum of human action used
For carrying out God's end. No creature works
So ill, observe, that therefore he 's cashiered.
The honest earnest man must stand and work;
The woman also; otherwise she drops
At once below the dignity of man,
Accepting serfdom. Free men freely work.
Whoever fears God, fears to sit at ease."*

Heaven everlasting.

That heaven is love, is a true key to the everlastingness of its duration. How, when once there, we can cease to love, cease, as has been observed already, to increase in loving, it is quite impossible to conceive. For as there will be nothing to disappoint us in God, so there will be nothing to tempt us in ourselves. The more we see of God, and learn of Him, and dwell with Him, the more we must love Him. His character will be increasingly revealed in all its perfection, His will in all its righteousness, His creation in all its wisdom, His redemption in all its fulness. And if there is nothing in Him to make our song flag, or our loyalty waver, or our love decay, or our service diminish, neither, through His sustaining grace, shall there be anything in us. In our glorified

* Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

bodies, and in our sinless nature, we shall be more than ever the very dwelling-place of God. For the elect in glory, sin will be even impossible. Faith shall never fail, hope shall never be disappointed, and though our love will never burn with an ardour to satisfy us, for he who thinks he loves God as much as He deserves, can hardly be said to love Him at all; it shall no longer doubt itself for its insincerity, or accuse itself for its lukewarmness. That will be a glorious and an unselfish security, in which the children of the resurrection shall rest themselves for ever in the everlasting arms, safe in the eternal purpose of Christ's redeeming love made perfect, and fulfilling its own nature in teaching, and glorifying, and elevating, and beatifying all through eternity those, whom the Father has given Him out of the world.

Degrees in glory.

The question of degrees in glory, incontestably established as it is by many passages of Scripture, is sometimes perplexing to those who are jealous of the doctrine of salvation by grace, may be more clearly seen in the light of the undeniable fact, that

with all imaginable varieties of depth and power regenerate souls adore God.

As a moral question, it is simply one of justice; that justice being a revelation of God's unerring righteousness in recognising and rewarding the use of the grace He has Himself bestowed. St Paul and the penitent thief are equally sinners saved by grace, and enter heaven on the identical terms of God's redeeming mercy; yet they shall have each their place, and their crown, and their work, and their glory, according to the fight they have fought, the course they have finished, and the faith they have maintained.

Let us look at it, however, a moment longer in connexion with the idea already maintained, that the evidence of eternal life in the soul is faith working by love. Only a regenerate soul—a soul, that is, with the Divine life implanted in it—can, in any real and sufficient sense, love God. As we love, we obey. And if faith receives salvation, obedience earns glory.

THERE are two accounts of the love of the regenerate soul; one finding it in God, the other rewarding it with God; the one proclaiming our dependence, the other vindicating our responsibility. *We love Him, because He first loved us,*—here is the first cause of man's love to God, in God's love to man. *If any man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him. I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me,*—here is the growth and increase of God's love to man, made dependent on man's love to God; God recognising and rewarding the use of His own mercy by multiplying it on the faithful soul. Now, what is glory? In the deepest sense of the word, it is the manifestation of God's image and character, shed abroad in our hearts now, as we are changed by His Spirit, "from glory to glory;" to be displayed at the Resurrection presently, when we shine forth as the sun, and death is swallowed up in victory. But the more we love now, the more we shall love then; the nearer we live

1 John iv. 19.

John xiv. 23.

Prov. vii. 17.

The meaning of glory.

to God now, the nearer we shall be to God then; the more we deny ourselves for His sake now, the more He will recompense us then; the more we open our hearts to Him, and surrender our wills to Him now, the more He will glorify us hereafter. And the cause of this is also the chosen instrument of fulfilling it. For nothing so expands and deepens our nature as true love, of any kind. But love to God has a special power of its own for making the heart bigger and deeper for Him to come in, and inhabit it, and fill it out of His fulness. The eye of the mind being enlarged to take in His truth, more and more light shines in; the door of the heart being widened to receive His grace, God rains on it showers of blessing. The entire moral being is ever growing larger through the sanctifying influence of Divine love; and thus, through the unconscious agency of his own devoutness, the Christian has "grace for grace," and yet it is *according to the measure of the gift of Christ.* For even God can give us only according to our capacity of receiving. No vessel can be more than

Eph. iv. 7.

brimful; and though, when once in heaven, we may all be growing alike in our power of receiving more grace, and learning more truth, and rendering more service, and drinking more joy, entering heaven, we start, so to speak, with all possible varieties of moral stature and spiritual attainment—the stature and the attainments being fashioned when on earth.

Howe's "Blessedness of the Righteous."

Howe, in his "Blessedness of the Righteous," has a noble passage, in which he contemplates innumerable multitudes of pure and happy creatures inhabiting and replenishing ample and spacious regions above, ignorant of nothing lawful, and pleasant to be known, curious to know nothing useless, endowed with a self-governing wisdom, yet with a noble freedom, all everywhere full of God, full of reverence and dutiful love, every one in his own eyes as nothing, self-consistent, ever free of all self-displeasure, all assured of their acceptance with God, all counting each other's felicity their own, and every one's enjoyment multiplied so many thou-

sandfold as he apprehends every one as perfectly pleased and happy as himself.

Well may the Christian say, as he ponders these noble thoughts, "Oh, what will it be to be there!" And if the joy is so rapturous, the rest so blessed, the company so edifying, the place so glorious, Christ visible, God near, death behind, judgment over, what is our hope of this glory, and what result does it produce in us; does it strengthen us for the duties of life, and console us under its sorrows, making its losses light, and its gains trifling? Surely we Christians are but half awake; and the children of this world are still in their generation wiser than the children of light. There are treasures for us that we will hardly think of, a home that it is barely worth our while to prepare for, joys which we languidly taste, gifts which we slothfully use.

Rom. xiii. 12. Yet *the night is far spent, the day is at hand.* We have slumbered and slept till our lamps are all but gone out; let us hasten to trim them, for the Bridegroom

is coming. Surely, if we quite believed about heaven all that the Bible tells us of it, how humility would clothe us, and zeal inflame us, and the thought of our inheritance ennoble us, making us calm and brave as the sons of God! We should live with men now, heirs with us of a common salvation, as those who hope presently to pass eternity together. Wherever we found souls without the Divine knowledge, we should endeavour to say to them with zeal, and yet with wisdom, *Come thou with us, and we will do thee good.* We should pray, believing in prayer: we should work, for *the time is short;* we should hate and resist sin, in, at least, something of the spirit in which we shall look back at it out of Paradise: sloth, and self-indulgence, and covetousness, and injustice to each other, would seem even a treason against the Lord that bought us with His blood.

Num. x. 29.

1 Cor. vii. 29

Oh, then, let us live for this glory, and wait for it, and do all we can to earn it, for our glory is our Master's, and He is coming *to be glorified in His saints, and to be*

2 Thess. i. 18

admired in all them that believe. The more souls we can win for Him, the more He will see of the *travail of His soul* and *be satisfied.* The greater the faith and patience that His servants manifest, the more evident the work of His Spirit before angels and men. It is but a very little while we have, at the longest, in which to pray, to trust, to suffer, to labour; and much of it is gone already. Let us make the most of what is left; *redeeming the time, because the days are evil.* And when the Good Shepherd leads His ransomed flock to pastures ever green, and waters ever still, on the delectable mountains of the true land of promise, then we shall say from our hearts, as none can quite say on this side of the river, *In Thy presence is fulness of joy: at Thy right hand are pleasures for evermore.*

Isa. liii. 11.

Eph. v. 16.

Psalm xvi. 11.

INDEX.

N.B.—*Not having my books at hand, I have been unable to verify all the quotations: but the reader may rely on them as substantially accurate.*

ALFORD, Dean, quoted, 57.
Assurance, Christian, meaning of, 11; objections to, 12; reasonableness of, 15; varieties of, 17; external aids of, 30.

BACON, Lord, quoted, 83, 147.
Barrow, Dr Isaac, quoted, 60.
Barry, Rev. Dr, quoted, 69.
Baptism, its relation to circumcision, 32; to be pleaded in prayer, 33.
Bible, study of, 236; inspiration of, 238.
Browning, E. B., quoted, 251.
Browning, R., quoted, 110.
Butler, Bp., quoted, 67.

CAIRD, Professor, quoted, 193.
Church of God, a testimony to the existence of Christ, 30; an evidence of the merciful purpose of God, 31.
Chastisement, the meaning of, 84; the twofold purpose of, 86; instances of, 90; a preparation for life, 104; a discovery of sin, 101; edification to the Church at large, 52; education for heaven, 106; meaning of long periods of, 119; an individual discipline, 118; mercifulness and gentleness of, 117; how to retain the blessing of, 120; need not be a time of uselessness, 122.
Contemplation of Christ a means of grace, 239.

DAVID, 200.
Death, meaning of, 143; solitude of, 145; Christ the conqueror of, 148; fear of, reasonable, 139; no rule to

measure or determine this fear, 152; object of this fear, 153; how to overcome it, 150; not to be dwelt on beforehand, 161.
Devoutness, meaning of, 223; why so rare, 226; conditions of, 230; helps to, 233.
Dictionary of Bible quoted, 67.
Diligence for God, 232.
Disappointments, varieties of, 196; occurring to all in turn, 200; what they are to teach us, 202; how we are to bear them, 206.
"Dreamthorp" quoted, 159.

ELIJAH, 94.
Enemies, personal, 175.

FAITH the first duty of man, 24; to be exercised on a "born" Saviour, 30; to be intelligent and well-instructed, 18; about others, 28; in chastisement, 117; the victory over death, 150; the joy of, 210.

GOD reconciled in Christ, 9; His character the ground of assurance, 15; His name revealing Him, 17; a sovereign, 42; guiding us as we are willing to be guided, 55; chastening us for His name's sake, 110; better than His gifts, 106, 193; giving as we are able to receive, 191.
Gospel, definition of, 9; difficulties of receiving it, 10.
Glory, meaning of, 255; degrees of, 253.

HEAVEN, service in, 247; everlasting, 252.
Heavenly-mindedness, real meaning of, 109.
Hezekiah, 139.
Hope, patience of, 212.
Howe, quoted, 257.

JACOB, 17, 91, 200.
Joseph, 105.
Josiah, 93.
Justice to the claims of others, 208.

KEBLE, Rev. John, quoted, 139.
Kempis, Thomas à, quoted, 99.

LIFE, Eternal, to be possessed now, 219; in heaven, 244; character of it, 245.
Life, Two Views of, 167.
Love to Christ, exhortation to, 159.

M'COSH, Professor, quoted, 68.
Meditation, more needed, 158.
Monod, Adolphe, quoted, 4 212, 217.
Moorhouse, Rev. J., quoted, 111.

Moses, 92, 114.

OBEDIENCE a preservative against murmuring, 192.

PASCAL, quoted, 145, 158, 167.
Paul, St, 201.
Perowne, Professor, quoted, 45.
"Pilgrim's Progress" quoted, 137.
Prayer, on what conditions answered, 68; the example of Christ in, 70; a habit, 233.
Presence of Christ traced in the anticipations of it in Holy Scripture, 4; not a physical nearness, 129; communicated through the Spirit, 134; when specially needed and given, 135; conditions of maintaining, 157; in death, 149, 162.
Providence, Divine, the meaning of, 39; the purpose and tendency of, 47; the result of, 45; viewed in connection with prayer, 66; and with human responsibility, 55; how far to be ascertained, 71; for whom, and for what, 75; in what sense special and general, 59.
Psalm, twenty-third, contains Old Testament doctrine of assurance, 16.

REBEKAH, 91.

SANCTIFICATION, real meaning and method of, 98.
Sardis, Church of, 88.
Saurin quoted, 129.
Scotland, Shorter Catechism of, quoted, 241.
Self-respect under disappointment, 206.
Shepherd, Christ the Good, 20; office of, 19.
Single-mindedness, meaning of, 209
Standard of Christians too low, 228.
Supper, Lord's, doctrine of, 241; a comfort after temptation, 171; on frequent receiving of, 242.
Sympathy, meaning of, 131, 205.

TEMPTATION, 179.
Thankfulness, 217.
Thomson, Archbishop, quoted, 39, 67.
Trench, Archbishop, quoted, 75, 77, 161, 213.

VALLEY of Shadow of Death, what meant by, 140; a distinct thing from dying, 139; illustration of, 141; peculiar sadness of, 142; why ordained, 143.
Vinet quoted, 4.

ZEAL for the souls of others, 160.

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